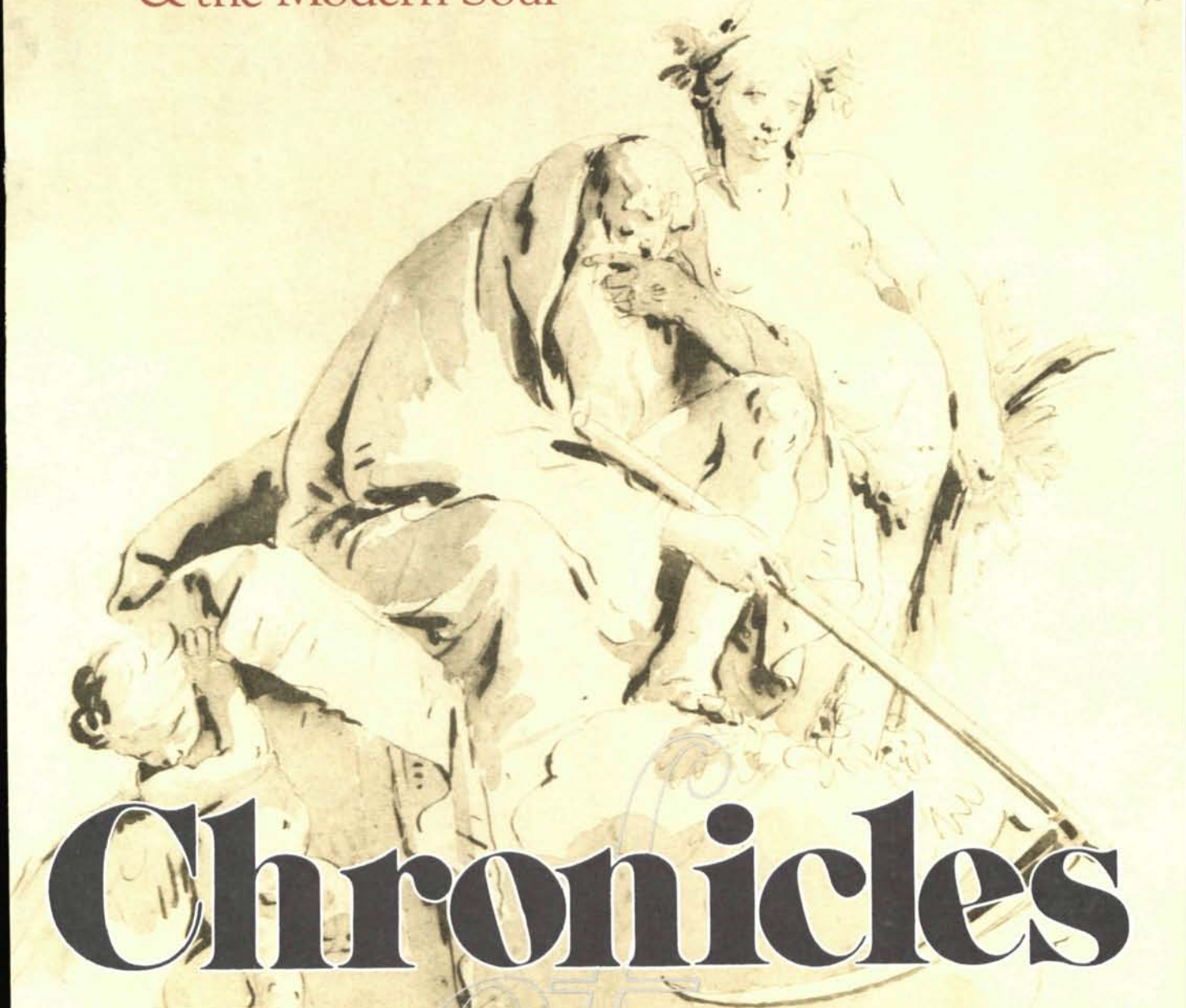
Religion, Psychology
& the Modern Soul



Chronicles of Culture

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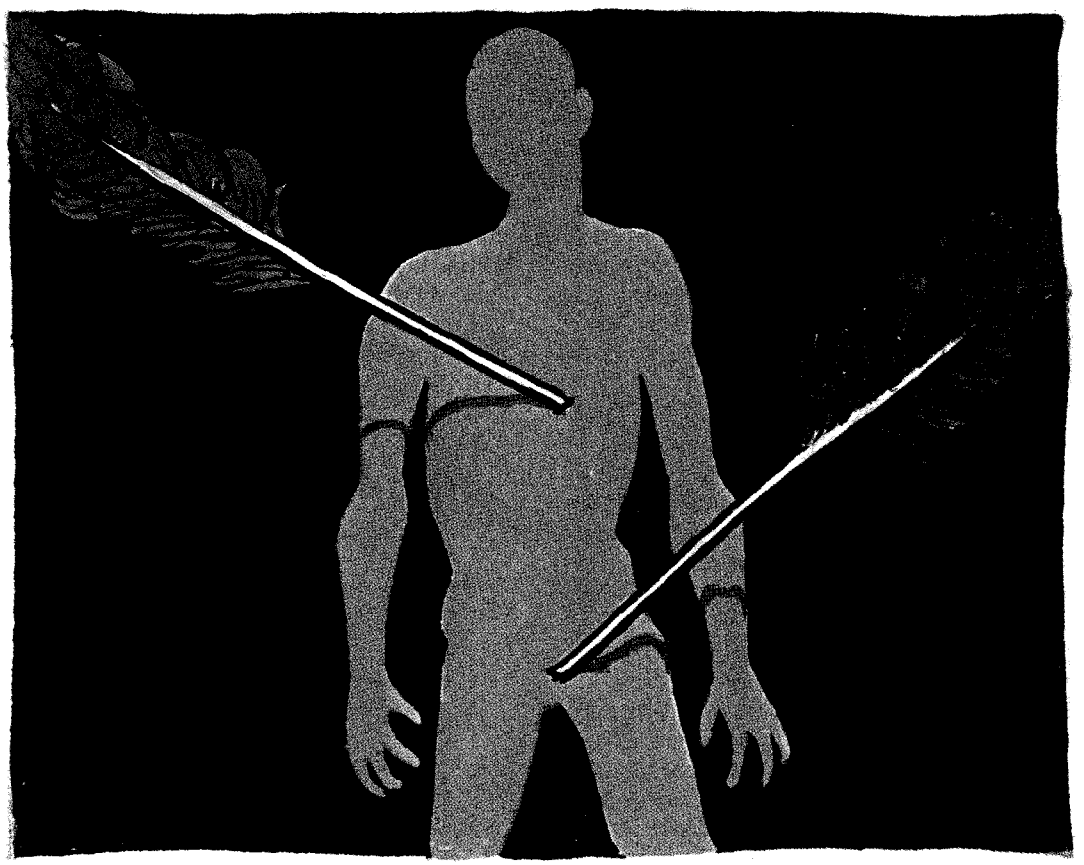
Religion, Psychology & the Modern Soul



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COMMENT

Beneath the revolutions of our time there is a more fundamental shift. A major dislocation is occurring in religion away from institutional churches and, more importantly, away from monotheism. The modern direction is toward a man-centered anthropology whose essential component is, as James Hillman terms it, a "polytheism of consciousness."

However, surface disruptions are more readily monitored. Since Vatican II, it has been no secret that high-ranking prelates and countless priests have begun to ally themselves less with the Catholic dogma than with revolutionary Marxism, freemasonry (no longer forbidden by the new canon law), charismatic movements, or simple worldliness as new icons. While this large-scale disaffection is regrettable, it must be noted that the phenomenon is impressive, some say irreversible. There is a general desacramentalization of Christian rites, liturgy, devotion, sacraments, and doctrine; these have now been replaced by new symbolizations, a new concept of sacred, an eagerness of the soul for new realities, new experiences, new formulations. Jacob Needleman writes in *Lost Christianity* that for many believers the time seems to have come to uncover their religion's original, fresh meaning from beneath the overused symbols. Such an operation does not usually lead to mere reform; Needleman himself speaks of "new religions."

While they agree with Needleman's general diagnosis and share his interest in the new religious phenomenon, others—like Jung, Gilbert Durand, and Hillman—attempt to employ the principles of psychology in their efforts to understand the significance of the spiritual dislocation, believing that their task is to reroute the soul away from its Christian state and toward pagan polytheism. Their analysis is Nietzschean. The soul that was once anchored in Christian moral polarities—good/evil, right/wrong, permitted/forbidden—is now being replaced by the ego; the objective being pursued by some is to allow the soul to fantasize at will, give full recognition to the "gods and demons," to the archetypes of death, rape, violence, the realities which preoccupy existence. Such a reorientation cannot be performed under the prevailing canons of morality and therapy; the self-rule (discipline, love of God, love of the Good) that religion and psychology preach to the soul, and the images they propose to modern man, no longer satisfy. In this sense, Hillman puts it well: "If the Christian vehicle no longer carries a culture's religious requirements, then it can no longer contain its pathologizing either. . . . It is imperative to be iconoclastic towards vessels that no longer truly work as containers and have become impediments to the pathologizing process."

If we read the ongoing debate correctly, we find that it takes place on two levels: among the various schools of psychology, and between them and the Christian world view. It is the second that interests us.

The question is: what kind of civilization—and religious world view—is most conducive to the soul's health? "Health," however, not as a humanistic, emancipatory, Freudian therapy defines the term, but in the sense of the soul's openness to the archetypes; not suppressing and ruling over these archetypes, but submitting to them, to their inhuman although personified otherness. "To be cut off from personified archetypal reality," writes J. Hillman, "means a soul cut off from its vital roots." This means that there is not one soul but many, each a response to a god, a force, a polycentric attraction. Again in Hillman's words: "If human nature is a composite of multiple psychic persons who reflect the persons in myths, then the experiencer is also a myth. He is not one but many, a flux of vicissitudes. A fixed recording center in their midst is the archetypal illusion of self-identity."

It would seem that the religious postulate conforming to such a view is polytheism, a "return to Greece," as Hillman puts it in neopagan language. Would the soul gain by such a return? Jungian psychology assumes that the "gods" are forces within ourselves, instincts and impulses. Yet it is never made clear whether these forces, longings, impulses, gods and demons are the soul's self-created images, or external realities. Jung himself speaks of "the proper place" given to them, and

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Hillman writes of "the governance of the gods." It is more reasonable to assume that both men are attracted to the Buddhist concept, according to which there is no *self,* only a flux of sensations cut up into discrete and illusionary consciousnesses. This view was shared by philosophers from Heraclitus to Nietzsche, and it has had decisive influence on devotees of Oriental wisdom. Jung discovered this wisdom after his encounter with medieval alchemy. In his view, which finds wide acceptance today, the alchemist sought not gold but the integration of personality, just like the modern psychologist.

Psychological therapy thus claims to meet the religious demands of our time and aspires to take the place of religion in healing the soul. The analyst finds the soul of modern man desiccated, bereft of a sense of the sacred, the myth, the fantastic. He also perceives the disproportion between dehumanizing technological trends and the precepts of a Christian milieu. There remain two possibilities: one is to lead the soul back to what is called the "pure meaning" of Christianity, the other is to lead it *farther* back—to pagan polytheism. Both paths lead to the root of the modern crisis of the soul and its religious predicament.

Unraveling the Christian roots has come to mean a dialogue with, and learning from, Oriental wisdom. Several—including Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann and W. Johnston, S.J.—maintain that Christianity has absorbed an overdose of Hellenic philosophy (an incorrect evaluation) that has led not only to rigid institutionalization, but also to the discarding of tradition: prayer, the integral vision of body and soul, the *ecclesia spiritualis,* the true gnosis. Johnson insists that the meaning of Christianity can be recaptured only through a new dialogue with Oriental religions and cultures, which he considers a more earthshaking and enriching encounter than the one between Judaism and the Hellenistic age. The Christian is told to practice Zen and Yoga, to immerse himself in the study of appropriate postures for meditative prayer, and to rid himself of emotions *(apatheia).* At the end of this process he will have acquired "a compassionate psychological knowledge of everything in the individual human being that resists the purity of the heart," as Needleman describes it.

If this is the path toward purified religious practice, on what path does revived polytheism travel? The modern concept of polytheism does not locate its gods on Olympus, but rather in an autonomous soul. True, the Jungians, the structuralists, and a spectrum of other schools claiming Husserl and Heidegger as mentors, speak of polytheism, archetypes, etc. as if they were "gods and daemons" outside the soul, thus objectively real. Nevertheless, they are forced to admit that these agents (some call them angels) are imaginary and mythical beings projected by the soul onto its own screen. Walter Otto, student of Greek religion, wrote that when Athena is seen guiding Odysseus, it should be interpreted as the Grecian understanding of man's frailty and a suggestion that human actions have a wide margin of uncertainty and mystery wherein the gods and goddesses are masters.

Archetypal psychology, the psychology of Jung's collective unconscious, delves into this penumbra of the human soul and elaborates a therapy in opposition to Freudians on the one side, and Skinnerians on the other. But the ideological substratum of Jungian therapy is nonetheless a new religion centered around the soul as essential reality. Thus it is logical to empty this soul of the contents that monotheistic religion has allegedly planted therein—first of all, the knowledge of good and evil. After all, structuralist analysis declares that the moral judgment is subject to periodic reevaluation. In this perspective, religious morality appears indeed restrictive.

Many sincerely religious spirits favor this Jungian path, the return to archetypes, traditions, Oriental wisdom, a better technique of prayer. It cannot simply be dismissed as erroneous, irrelevant, heretical, irrational, unscientific. The new psychology—which claims to be very old, as old as myth, the gods, the shaman's initiation, the mystic's search for ultimate reality—is a powerful factor in the massive dislocation of our spiritual state, but it alone did not cause that dislocation. The phenomenon suggests a weakening sense of transcendence in the Western world, and a consequent effort to replace God with the soul and its multitude of demons. The entire message of Mircea Eliade's work is that while Christianity may be dried out, man remains a religious being. That message is underlined by Needleman, who concludes that Christianity has no force left to bring about change, to produce Christian results, to be meaningful in the life of man.

One error of these psychological theories lies in their enthusiasm for the autonomous soul. No one has ever seen such a naked soul, or if he were to, he would find only a fantasy world that focuses on "archetypes" symbolized by gods and mythical figures (Dionysus, Hermes, Oedipus) or on the blurred objects of hallucination. The soul will not fare better at the hands of psychologists than at the hands of ancient therapists, the mystagogues and Aesculapian healers of Greece. A second error is to assume that Christianity suffocates the soul. Since the soul is *not* autonomous, it needs guidelines, precepts, and limitations. Otherwise it becomes the locus of a frenzied and tumultuous bundle of impulses, the scene of continuous Dionysian extravaganza. To detach the soul from moral information is a typical modernistic enterprise which can provide nothing but a new set of *im*moral information: polytheistic, archetypal, fantastic, destructive. The majority of current art, literature, and public discourse testifies to the truth of this diagnosis.

—Thomas Molnar

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On Nisbet: A Duologue

Robert Nisbet: *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary;* Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA.

Man-of-the-World Conservatism

by James Hitchcock

The first question that should be asked about this book is why it was written. The subtitle is somewhat misleading in that the contents are a mere 70 topics, hardly a dictionary in the full sense. But the first word of the title suggests the purpose. At the invitation of Harvard University Press, the distinguished social theorist Robert Nisbet here offers his mature opinions on a variety of subjects of his own choosing. It is an invitation few writers could resist, permitting as it does even the most outrageous expressions of personal predilection on a variety of only loosely connected subjects, each of which could be a book in itself.

It presumes a good deal to think that general readers are interested in a writer's mere prejudices. Thus in evaluating the book it is first necessary to ask whether it is worth the money. The answer is yes, because what is offered are the ripe reflections of one of our premier social thinkers, a man who has spent over 40 years meditating on our changing world. Even when he is wholly wrong, he is always interesting, provocative, and graceful in style.

The word "prejudice" is here used in Edmund Burke's sense of a firmly held opinion about the world which does not rest on rational foundations alone but which is not therefore irrational. It is the kind of belief that orients the individual towards the world, which permits him to act decisively in situations where reason alone provides no sure guidance. Since Nisbet is one of the better-known "neoconservatives" (perhaps the prefix is unnecessary in his case), many of his topics are predictable. Those sharing his opinions will savor his witty and incisive summaries of subjects including community, crime and punishment, environmentalism, futurology, human rights, judicial activism, permissiveness, public opinion, tyranny, and victimology. But there are also some unexpected entries on what is a short list as dictionaries go—boredom, chain of

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Honoring the Thinkable

by Leopold Tyrmand

"Here lies wisdom," says Professor Nisbet, pointing to the body of thought and attitudes which some may call conservative and others may not, but which everybody will agree needs a name. He is right. Yet he believes that the codification of that wisdom, those holy scrolls—from which we are capable of inheriting, culling, and enjoying invaluable, correct principles and insights—are doomed to defeat, if not oblivion. Whether he's right or wrong is hard to tell: a lament can be poignant without being convincing. In this instance it takes the form of a volume of portable Nisbet. It is a fair achievement of a lifetime of distingué scholarly enterprises by a learned and civil mind endowed with poise and taste. The tome has a marvelous title, *Prejudices,* which in this case is an apologia of a word: it defends the right to intellectual sympathies and impulses that coincide with mature, responsible measurements of rationality, subtly refined components of ideologies. It also reaffirms the shallowness of middlebrow conformism by proving that words which are routinely discredited by commonplace mentalities—and such practices abound in the reigning cultural ambience of our time—actually are sources of forgotten rectitudes. Finally, *Prejudices* composes itself into a seminal paradox, or challenge, in the context of its subtitle: *A Philosophical Dictionary.* Does that indicate that Mr. Nisbet has become an encyclopedist? If so, aren't the noun and notion of "prejudice" anathema among *les philosophes?* To Diderot, "prejudice" was a hate word, a call to vehement rejection carrying a connotation like that of today's "fascism" or "terrorism." To Mr. Nisbet, however, it is a source of wistful sagacities; it is also a key to insightful opinions that have been mused upon through the years, as well as to knowledge, to history, and to some glimpses into the human condition.

So where do we go from here, having discovered so many indicators in the title? If we're heading toward a confrontation with the 18th-century axioms which, among other things good and

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bad, are at the bottom of the American constitutional ethos, we risk petty animosities instead of an enriching discourse. All lexical badinage notwithstanding, one emerges from reading Mr. Nisbet with the feeling that the exactness and seemliness of his thinking and argument are *sans reproche,* but that something is wanting. That "something" was present and is still discernible in the minds, words, and opinions of Montesquieu and Voltaire; at that time and as philosophical divagation, it engendered and lastingly shaped human and communal stances and predilections (prejudices?), for better or worse. When reading Mr. Nisbet one feels, sadly, that he appears to have voluntarily renounced such influence at the very outset of his endeavors. Granted, he's correct in most of his condemnations: Jean-Jacques *should,* long since, have been fitted with a black hat and grilled severely for all the disfigurations he inflicted on the Western psyche and its propensities. But the spirit of Rousseau still lives in seedy, radic-liberal editorial offices in San Francisco and New York City, while those perfectly accurate sages whom Mr. Nisbet invokes are just preserved in a delicious and aromatic brine and have aged remarkably well; unfortunately, no one dares market their intellectual gourmandism for mass consumption. The vicissitudes of history and sociotechnological metamorphoses notwithstanding, *something* eluded those sages, and Mr. Nisbet offers them little support other than a lot of graceful, judicious *tristesse.*

We now have three centuries of modern civilization behind us, each of which has taught the Western man a little. The 18th century taught him about thinking, its complexities, traps, and humiliations. The 19th century taught him self-evaluation and all its vanities, malaises, and disgraces. The 20th century taught, and is still teaching, him self-destruction and all its follies, abominations, and masochisms. To my mind, we can still preserve a few vestiges of humanness and dignity. We owe a good deal to the Age of Reason—regardless of its sins, its gratuitous bestialities in France, its successful assaults upon those religious sources of normative ethics that had served so well for so long. Professor Nisbet is fully and admirably aware that the conservative persuasion is—today more than ever—a sophisticated system of impulses and preferences, intellectual scents and literary pleasures. His merit, therefore, lies in his valiant attempt to revive a priceless tradition: philosophy as the source of ideologies which, in turn, may (sooner or later) become calls for political action and social improvement. In an era when ideologies originate in emotions, or rather passions, that consist mostly of primitive crudity and are saturated with derangement, Mr. Nisbet's undertaking is laudable. That he composes this exertion in the lucid form of a dictionary suffused with the ambition of being a very refined primer is glorious. But does Mr. Nisbet reach his most genuine goal, that is, does he affect the minds of his contemporaries? I, for one, have no unequivocal answer. Some remarkable rudiments of this book are in its tonal key, and I have always believed that the promise of influence lies in *that* element rather than in dialectical acumen or the juggling of statistics. The book is written with the marvelous modesty of a learned and patient explicator who is meek and humble in the face of the enormity of human experience and knowledge. But humility, venerable as it is, does not inflame minds—of course, the time when philosophy infused anxieties and agitation into souls is long gone. Yet—and here is the crux—it seems as if that's precisely what mankind seems to yearn for these days.

Thus, Mr. Nisbet reveals himself to be a master diagnostician. His dissection of universal anomie, his observations on "shame" and "shameless" cultures deserve to be sympathetically vulgarized by *Time* magazine and, even at that price, transmitted to the collective consciousness—if such a thing actually exists. Fat chance that anything resembling such a transmission will occur, and that's what I mourn. So it appears that, if salvation is in diagnoses (which I doubt), we are in a more clement aura of expectations. In a wonderful chapter on environmentalism, which can be read as a minitreatise on the instant rewards of militancy, Mr. Nisbet touches on something simple and crucial, but he stops short of creating a grand synthesis. He correctly notes that the ecological, environmental, and preservationist movements have emerged as fixtures of the political left. He then proceeds to explain why that is so, and why industrial capitalism, one of the most momentous crucibles of Western civilizational success, has become a helpless villain. But one is left with a sense that this fine, well-documented point needs more elaboration, a more *engagé* posture. In the face of Mr. Nisbet's impeccable reasoning, one begins to feel that American conservatism is a sort of misnomer, that its most basic propellant is not that of conserving but of expanding —in the largest intellectual designation of the verb. Modern American conservatism's essence is dynamism, and its precious novelty (no paradox intended) lies in the current freshness of its ideas pertaining to the particulars of social reality and human endeavors. It somehow stands in contradiction to its own appellation. Its ethos is suffused with many hues of creative and functional activism; its temper is optimistic, tolerant, even cheerful, friendly to controversy and debate, confident and at ease with its own fabric of convictions. It seems to be yearning for a protracted and constructive drive to repair and improve the Western civilizational reality that was damaged by the nihilism that crept in under the disguise of liberal progressive humanism. This kind of conservatism, the name notwithstanding, seems to want to explain the world and human existence in terms of potentialities and possibilities that have been mauled by utopian zealotry, but which nevertheless—so goes the modern conservative credo—can still be galvanized through a rational reorganization of our common

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feeling, thinking, and believing, of the general awareness of our common destiny. In a marginal but nonetheless bizarre aftermath overlooked by many but which may epitomize our age, the conservative in America is now hated by the conservationist—that is, the liberal or radical bigot or worshiper of old, failed, stale prejudices. In order to be a fighting philosophical proposition, Mr. Nisbet's tract not only should have noticed that (which it did), but it also should have powerfully emphasized the grotesquerie inherent in this Kafkaesque metamorphosis of a fair knight of progress into a fanatic of reductionism. Thus, if we dwell on Mr. Nisbet's unaccentuated foray into a semantic wilderness, the question emerges: Is there a feasible, positive scenario for what we today wish to *call* conservatism as a blueprint for human and social conduct? In other words: Is it possible to score big in the conceptual struggle by renaming notions? To my mind, it is. Some new articulation of moral superiority must be stressed, one that points out that the modern, enlightened conservative combats not people but ideas, while his adversaries try to maim the *carriers* of ideas they deem false, to ruin careers, and to perform character assassinations. The liberal frame of mind somehow craves violence directed against people like Westmoreland, Nixon, Reagan, whereas the conservative id does not wallow in visions of the execution of a Friedan or a Fonda, for it is never sure they won't end up as repentant nuns (history, the conservative breviary, is replete with similar examples). This is the situation that should be encapsulated in a slogan, but Mr. Nisbet does not deliver one. The notion and ethics of work suddenly change in times of structural unemployment, which encompasses not just economic but also spiritual torments and values. A conservative knows more about spiritual values than a liberal, though he has difficulty translating this knowledge into one mightily reverberating word of hope. Mr. Nisbet's conservatism assumes a cerebral broadness, a generosity of inquiries, attitudes of intellectual largess for his potential sympathizers. He has little to say about how to transubstantiate these virtues of mind into the quotidian patterns of comportment for the contemporary human of median intelligence.

So we have a sublime critique and a message of benign catastrophism. No mention of conservatism's positivist potential or its faith in the future. But Nisbet, when read alongside Giambattista Vico, may provide another perspective: any structural analysis of the present must take into account the circular recurrence of ideals—values come back modified to be sure, but with an astonishing freshness of substances refurbished for the necessities of the new age. Mr. Nisbet is gently pessimistic about that, but he never actually denies the attainability of a renewed logical and moral norm, or that the "old new" pricelessness of words like *correctitude, convention, custom* may once again merge into an indication of *how* to live. With all his ardent reverence for the idea of community, Mr. Nisbet knows that the notorious Woodstock Festival, convoked in the name of communal idolatry, was a doleful flop exactly because it flouted all ties to time-honored communal experience and wisdom. What he seems to neglect to inquire about is what separates—or unites—wisdom and knowledge, and what role is played by empathy and malaise in the realm of ideas. By now, it should be clear that the success of the modern version of conservatism will be found in the lore of composed ideological systems *as well as* in the vastness of world views that appeal to options, partialities, predilections. Mr. Nisbet shines when he explains the fundamentals of our thinking and behavior as they transform from the obscure past into organized cultures. He's best at conveying the precious belief that man should (but not must) be formed by forces that transcend him—the idiosyncratic Nisbetian "catechumenate" of a mind that is rationalist to the core. He is less clear about what to do with parish, neighborhood, guild, social class, church, free associations—that is, the pillars of Nisbetian social order, and thereby a supreme value—in a Silicon Valley-style socioeconomic environment. He invokes Burke, his great mentor: "Tradition was for Burke absolutely vital to both social order and freedom." We have no quarrel with that, but Burke was, in his own way, strictly antitotemic; that is perhaps why his work is still valid. It's difficult to imagine how in *our* time of social and psychological mobility he would defend parish, guild, and social class without thoroughly updating these categories, even at a considerable ideological cost. It's not that people once were "better" because they were rigidly moral; no historical reality bears out such a vision of the past, as moral principle alone is not enough to make people better. *If* they were better, it was because both morality and principle were perceived as attractive, desirable, alluring, worth living and dying for. Such an image can be formed only through culture, educative tenets, and—of all things—fashionable mores. Tradition may be either morally neutral or morally uplifting: it is rooted in feelings which once again bring under consideration modern conservatism's semiotic problem—that is, the quandary of significant denomination. In modern Israel the most tremendous social force is the adherence (or simply a desire to belong) to a powerful and meaningful tradition, and this emotion makes a natural conservative out of a progressive, an atheist, a laborite, and a radical. What Mr. Nisbet means by "social class" as a conservative value is quite risky to ponder. We are far from certain whether a social entity may or may not be autonomous, closed, autarchic, defined once and forever in our age of pluralism—which, after all, *is* lauded as an American *conservative* virtue. With praiseworthy lucidity Mr. Nisbet argues my own article of faith—that without Aquinas there would not be General Motors, that there is a chain of consequences that binds seemingly disparate

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LIBERAL CULTURE

Sainte-Beuve Revisited

In its recent attempt to denigrate the literary status of social critic Tom Wolfe, *Mother Jones*, a magazine of procommunist scholarship, conceded that his influential essay "Radical Chic" was "very well written and mostly clearly observed" but then added this bit of generic criticism:

> Yet Wolfe is striking much harder than a satirist would. His intention was really to do harm, and he succeeded brilliantly.

This means, of course, that Pope and Swift were not satirists, according to *MJ* erudition. As far as we know, they really did intend to "do harm" to John Partridge and Colley Cibber. □

signs, and that there is a great chance for the modern conservative impulse in that truth. However, General Motors is here and with it have come some modified categories of both social logic and social morality about which St. Thomas could have had only dim premonitions. We know by now that the most successful nations in history have flourished on the sense of moral and behavioral measure, while victorious empires were built on social *convenance*. Societies thrive where restraint, principle, norm, moral rule, convention, custom, and widely accepted usage of existential modes are woven into a rich social fabric. Oddly enough, social and behavioral hypocrisy, prudery, puritanism, have contributed more to the welfare of large communities than it is fashionable to admit today. Yet there is a caveat here: coercion, moralizing, preachery, or mere nostalgic reverie that so often transmutes into petulant arbitrariness, won't do. The values enumerated above must be freely accepted as an archetype for a better life and perceived as a source of glamorous satisfaction and self-advancement. Once again, culture alone is the instrument to achieve the goal. Speaking today about the so-called bourgeois culture, no one points out its prevalent ambience of security, serenity, dignity, calm gemütlichkeit. Those were false impressions—so say that culture's rabid critics—just superficial images from a mid-19th-century daguerreotype. Isn't that, alone, quite a bit? When else have surfaces—before or after the bourgeois culture's reign—been gentle, serene, secure? The collective soul—if something like that exists—of America is plagued by a palpable foreboding that our civilization is crumbling, and even if a return to the images of bygone (mostly not true) placidity and quiescence is out of the question, *something* must be done about the crumbling. Mr. Reagan once claimed to know something about that quagmire and what to do about it. Yet, midway through his term, he has done nothing to address the issue, to tackle its momentousness, if not its eschatology, neither in terms of practicality, nor of moral guidelines. Still, an expectation persists that modern conservatism seems qualified to structure the answer.

Is *Prejudices* a step in that direction? I would say very much so, but a too-cautious one. *National Review* excoriated Mr. Nisbet for his deviation from the party line on the abortion dilemma. The journal's assessment of his views reminded me of a chat in a waterfront bar with a muscular sailor who was fiercely anti-abortion. He maintained that life begins with the first lustful gaze cast by a male at a chosen female—a far more uncompromising opinion than even the most purist prolifer's. I tried to bring the incertitudes of science and philosophy into the exchange, or even the agonies of dualism which harrowed the early Church fathers, or the Thomist queries about form and matter, but my attempts were markedly tempered by the easily perceptible thickness of his neck. Yet *National Review* has a point, in that "something is missing from his [Nisbet's] vision of things. . . . Maybe a certain Aristotelian vigor that, instead of just reacting, seeks to define and resolve." The liberal *New Republic* propounds a more charitable view:

> The value of this book is that it reminds us of the harmonies of organic society and the irreplaceable losses that occur when they are destroyed in the name of abstract principles, whether they are the Declaration of the Rights of Man or urban renewal. For Burke that led to a call for prudence, for a respect for the *present*, rooted as it is in the past.

But *New Republic* discusses Mr. Nisbet from a position of stiff literalness which presumes that what he longs for is a simple reinstatement of the dissected status quos of the past—a rather naive presumption. Even his most maladroit glorifications make sense only as legacies to be considered for inspection before they are reapportioned, much as one

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might reassess long-forgotten stock from great-grandfather's safe. When he speaks of the perils of egalitarianism or the virtues of feudalism, it goes without saying that in a time of test-tube babies, Apple computers, and Social Security the notion of hierarchy has to be re-invented, revalidated, and morally refined—especially in light of the fact that rigid hierarchies and purely feudal interdependencies actually are blooming in our present reality, planted and perpetuated by liberals, in spite of the crude, perfidious, egalitarian cant of the liberal media. "Emulation not imitation," Mr. Nisbet seems to say, and this is how his ideological tastes and methodological suggestions should be read. But it seems to me that he somehow diminishes the impact of his work by not pressing enough the case for incremental creativity, for his own apt and perspicacious suggestions, putting in their stead a posture of distinguished grief and cataclysmic elegance. Not long ago, the noxiously leftist *Nation* featured a telling observation by an ultraliberal social analyst:

> For the central verity of American political life is that the 1960s produced a new class of voters, the educated white-collar and professional middle-class, which makes up a third of the electorate. It is precisely this element which is coming to believe that neither party can adequately address America's problems.

That's right. Those who can figure out how to present this stratum with the New Word, or a captivating message, will rule America, and perhaps the West. In one of his best chapters, "Anomie," Mr. Nisbet synthesizes with a superlative force of persuasion the sense of *nomos*, "meaning the large body of laws, traditions, and mores which people inherit from the past and which provide the norms, values, incentives and constraints in their lives." He should have focused more, and more profoundly, on the incentives. I, for one, believe that he could have found an eager audience in that "new class of voters." They are ready for new moral and existential proclamations.

Which brings us back to Voltaire, a natural referent for any work subtitled *A Philosophical Dictionary*. Why did Voltaire have such tremendous and lasting impact on minds, even on those who disagreed with or loathed him, whereas it would be irreflective to project the same effect for Mr. Nisbet's treatise? Are history and sociotechnological change the only culprits? There are analogies between their intellectual complexions and fates: Mr. Nisbet has challenged the reigning cultural climate; his remarks are rooted in nonconformism and originality; his erudition matches that of M. Arouet. Voltaire was jailed and exiled for his beliefs; for the same reason, Nisbet was—for a long time—blacked out by the liberal press, ostentatiously ignored by the liberal opinion-making apparatus, and occasionally burned at stakes fueled by copies of the *New York Times*. Both men have strong, singular influences from their cultural heritages: Voltaire from Montaigne, Nisbet from Burke; their intellectual inheritances converge in the distant past, in the Socratic teachings about how and to what purpose man's cerebral endowment and mental equipment should be used. Voltaire wanted to rationalize the universe; Nisbet wants to dissect and utilize the permanence of wisdom—and those endeavors are not in conflict. For Voltaire "philosophy" meant originality, clarity, sharpness of speculation, and boldness of inferences; for Nisbet "prejudice" means the maturity of moral value and intellectual reflection. Tête-à-tête, I would imagine they could converse quite amicably. Yet to many it would sound preposterous, if not sacrilegious, to invoke a comparison. I do not feel quite at ease with it either, for fairly objective reasons. Mr. Nisbet's weakness is his pose of sorrowful dignity. Voltaire's strength was that he saw his *Dictionaire* as a manual for triumphant rationalism, the yeast of oncoming ideologies, the catechism of secular humanism; in the end, it is a manifesto so endowed with cultural charm that it still retains validity and relevance, even if the luster has gone. And he was right. He knew how to make a banner out of a lexicon, to give his work an intellectual vibrancy that generates acceptance through smiles. No one, friend or foe, could fail to respond to such a sagacious irony as this:

> The ancient oriental customs are so prodigiously different from our own that nothing should appear extra-

LIBERAL CULTURE

The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Liberation

Beatrice Webb, so we've always thought, was a leading Fabian socialist who also happened to be the wife of Sidney Webb. But in an adulatory review of *The Diary of Beatrice Webb: Volume I 1873–1892* appearing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Ms. Jane Marcus discovers more, much more, about Mrs. Webb: "Readers of this diary will see how she trained Sidney to be a good wife." A woman with a male wife? And

NOW's leaders think they have invented everything. □

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ordinary to anyone who is a little better read. A Parisian is startled when informed that the Hottentots cut off one testicle from a male infant. The Hottentots are likewise astonished that the Parisians keep both of them.

That is Voltaire's trump card, a mesmerizing, inimitably wise lightness of touch which, in perennial ideological tournaments, converts admirers into supporters and followers. Voltaire, like Socrates (his sad grandeur notwithstanding), belongs to the rare breed of funny philosophers who implant truths through exhilaration of mind. This is perhaps one of the reasons why their presences linger in cultural and intellectual ecosystems forever. Their ideas may become discredited—their spirits will never fade.

Even if he has not produced an *Écrasez l'infâme!* (which, alone, would have assured Voltaire a top spot in any Madison Avenue firm), Professor Nisbet has come up with a magnificent and momentous dissection of some of the most troubling quandaries of the modern mind. He possesses an acumen for *le mot juste* which is rarely found in our corner of the ideological ball park. With *Prejudices,* he has entered the big game, where we play with words and notions for the highest stakes—the survival of our civilization. His valiance will not be forgotten. □

Hitchcock

continued from page 6

being, comfort, effrontery, epitaphs, genius, intimacy, metaphor, old age, snobbism, uncertainty, and wit. As the entries suggest, some of them are perhaps self-indulgent pet "prejudices" which the author has been wanting to get off his chest. But none are dull, and none trivial. Only a well-stocked, penetrating mind could get away with ringing the changes on these almost random topics and still make them interesting. The considered judgments of nearly five decades of the best kind of thinking about human society are not to be ignored.

Obviously there is much here to warm the heart of the conservative, part of it Nisbet's concise and illuminating discussion of what "liberalism" and "conservatism" really are. He argues that the seemingly undeniable drive toward enforced equality in modern society is at the root of most other social pathologies, since such egalitarianism inexorably levels all meaningful spiritual and cultural standards and arouses envy in those who fall short of those standards. Nisbet has devastating things to say about fashionable attitudes toward criminals, about environmentalism, about the state of academia, and numerous other subjects where egalitarian dogma has done its work. Correspondingly, he also traces the decline in our regard for liberty, as an inevitable concomitant of the spread of equality. The observations are often biting and, faithful to the author's characterization of his book, may strike unsympathetic readers as unfair, merely the dicta of a self-conscious curmudgeon. The nature of the book means that no subject can be argued thoroughly, although the interested reader can refer to Nisbet's numerous other magisterial works. Even when he seems flippant, his opinions are obviously based on years of considered reflection. (His most savage remarks are reserved for his fellow academicians, whom he has been able to observe at close range for many years.) The book is genuinely philosophical, based on wide reading and, at every crucial point, not merely content to express a personal opinion but able to lay bare the essential issues. Part of the book's worth, like the worth of all real social thought, is found precisely in its attempt to show how events of seemingly rather minor significance reveal deep strains in the entire civilization.

The lead article in the volume, which follows an alphabetical arrangement, is "abortion," and there can be little doubt that the author picked it not merely because it comes close to the beginning of the alphabet but also with a full sense of its provocative effect. Any stereotypes readers may have about Nisbet's conservatism are immediately shattered. The entry on abortion is an argument in favor of at least the limited permissibility of the practice, along with a rather harsh denunciation of those who would ban it. Although at first glance this seems out of step with the conservatism of the rest of the volume, in fact it is a fitting frontispiece for it.

His chief argument against the antiabortionists is that throughout history the practice has always been tolerated to some degree: legally in the ancient world, illegally throughout most of Christian history. Thus, he argues in effect, those who would now restore the laws which previously forbade the practice are not being genuinely conservative. It strikes me that there is a good deal of speciousness in this argument. For example, the famous clause in the Hippocratic Oath is read by Nisbet as forbidding the physician *only* to give a woman a "pessary" (suppository) for the purpose, not as forbidding other methods, although there would be little purpose in such a partial prohibition and ancient laws frequently used specific cases to stand for whole categories of actions (e.g., "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" as forbidding all lying). He also seems largely unaware of the realities of contemporary abortion practice, implying that prolifers are merely dogmatic in wanting to forbid abortions in the early stages when the fetus is not recognizably human and citing the familiar hard cases (rape, incest) which all authorities admit are rare. But as even the proabortion press now admits, it is not unusual for crying, starving babies to survive unsuccessful abortion attempts, and they are commonly left to die. The point of antiabortionists' trying to show people those gruesome photographs is precisely to show that

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many fetuses do look exactly like small babies and that their humanity cannot be denied. It seems odd that Nisbet does not find it necessary even to address this moral concern.

A book of this kind is meant to be provocative, and Nisbet is undoubtedly aware of what he is doing when he tells antiabortionists that their proclaimed loyalty to family values actually works against them, because, after all, government prohibitions of abortion are an interference with family autonomy. Here again, however, there are dimensions to the problem which he does not address. Is not family autonomy severely undermined when minor daughters can have abortions (paid for by the government) without even their parents' knowledge, or when wives can abort without their husband's consent? In the end, the morality of abortion has to be argued in terms of the act itself, not merely in terms of families. Obviously we do not, in the name of family autonomy, allow people to decide when is the appropriate time to dispatch their elderly grandparents to the great beyond.

Nisbet's aversion to the antiabortion position seems to have several roots, and it is an appropriate opening chapter because it probably defines his conservatism better than any other part of the book. On the simplest level he represents what I have sometimes called "man-of-the-world" conservatism, an outlook which is frankly accepting of basic human desires (e.g., for property) that liberals often condemn, a view which finally takes the traditional code of conduct of the gentleman as its practical norm. Nisbet is thus critical of the Supreme Court's 1973 decision permitting abortion on demand because it upset what he regards as a practical solution to the problem—abortions were performed, no one made much of an issue of that fact, yet society was not in the position of seeming to condone or encourage the practice—a "moderate," perhaps Burkean arrangement now threatened by fanatics from both sides (although Nisbet clearly regards the antiabortionists as the more dangerous). His usual acuity seems to leave him here, since he almost totally prescinds from the wider cultural context of the issue, particularly its close association with fanatical feminism. It can hardly be denied that abortion is antifamily when the ultimate stated reason for allowing it is so that women can escape the unthinkable burdens of motherhood. In other contexts Nisbet sees quite clearly how the various aspects of the moral revolution of our time stem from poisoned roots. On abortion he seems to have a blind spot.

A second source of his position is his antistatism, and he regards it as a telling criticism that antiabortionists, many of them professed conservatives, are now calling on the government to restrict personal freedom in this area. But of course, if abortion is what its opponents say it is, then in prohibiting it the government is merely exercising its minimal police power—the protection of human life. In addition, Nisbet misses the point that, with regard to abortion, as in other areas of personal behavior, the moral revolution of our times has largely been initiated and carried forward by the activist liberal state. Abortion on demand is now allowed because of the same activist lawyers and judges of whom Nisbet is so witheringly critical elsewhere in his book. It is financed with public money (a subject about which he says nothing) and actively promoted in the public schools and by social-welfare agencies. Its strongest advocates state openly that they see it as the centerpiece in a sweeping moral revolution.

I suspect Nisbet has simply not been paying close attention to the things which exercise the so-called "social conservatives." Thus in his entry on the family he makes the small but telling mistake of referring to the "White House Conference on the Family" rather than, as it was officially called, the White House Conference on Families. The Carter administration deliberately used the plural form in order to indicate that the traditional understanding of family was being scrapped and that it was the conference's purpose to legitimize every kind of social arrangement—communes, homosexual liaisons, etc.—as families, one as good as another. Here man-of-the-world conservatism appears to mesh with Nisbet's sociological assumptions, in that he accepts without question the standard social-science explanation for the decline of the family as caused by economic change, especially those changes which have stripped the family of its economic functions and have weakened its hold on property. Nisbet apparently agrees with those who think that, once the family has been reduced to a community mainly based on personal relationships, it has lost most of its strength anyway. Thus he treats the White House Conference merely as a foredoomed effort to shore up a failing institution, and misses the fact that it was part of a deliberate and continuing social revolution. Surely the family is for many people what Christopher Lasch has called it—a haven in a heartless world. Many profamily people are exercised by political attempts to suppress even that function, but Nisbet offers them little sympathy.

The third and perhaps most telling clue in his treatment of abortion is his reference to Roman practice. The Romans, he argues, were the most thoroughly family-oriented people in history, yet they permitted abortion. Q.E.D. For Nisbet it is thus anomalous that the early Christians condemned a practice which the ancient world found

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tolerable. What is even odder is that so perceptive a sociologist would miss the point that Christianity was precisely supposed to bring about a moral revolution in the world. It would be strange indeed if the morality of the early Church differed in no significant way from that of the Roman Empire. I do not know what Nisbet's personal religious and moral beliefs are. From this book, however, I infer that his man-of-the-world conservatism is finally a kind of classicism, in the sense of fidelity to the world view of Greece and Rome, from which later centuries mark a deleterious falling off. The 20th-century sociologist from Berkeley stands revealed as a kind of Ciceronian moralist. Thus religion is treated somewhat skittishly. While the supernatural dimension of Christianity is acknowledged, the claim is also made that historically the paramount religion of the West succeeded mainly for what it taught about this life, not for its doctrines about the next, a judgment with which I disagree. Nisbet, although a learned man, is not always on sure footing when he deals with religion, as in his handling of the Galileo case and his claim (repeated more than once) that St. Francis of Assisi was almost burned at the stake, and that some of his followers actually were, because they denied man's dominion over nature. St. Francis was never in real danger of being burned, and those of his followers who got into trouble with the Church did so mainly for their extreme doctrine concerning the practice of poverty, which undermined hierarchical authority.

Like most conservatives, Nisbet recognizes religion as essential for the moral and intellectual stability of a society. But he is equally aware of its revolutionary potential, its propensity for "enthusiasm" in the 18th-century sense of the word. I have the impression that he would prefer to dispense with such a volatile and unpredictable substance if that were possible, and to rely on the ripe, tempered wisdom of the gentleman's code. The last line of the book extols the Roman virtue of *gravitas*. Nisbet seems to be of two minds about the kind of social conservatism summed up in the movement called the Moral Majority. While generally disapproving, he also takes gleeful satisfaction in the fact that it has frightened the dogmatic liberals, who see it as a serious threat to their moral hegemony over American life. But in his entry on conservatism, he also estimates that, despite Ronald Reagan, the conservative movement is losing ground in America and cannot in the end defeat the ubiquitous liberal state.

Here Nisbet's personal opinions merge with one of the intriguing questions in current American politics—whether recent elections indicate a permanent conservative counterrevolution. Like the leaders of the Republican Party, Nisbet seems to enjoy watching religious "enthusiasts" ram sticks into liberal spokes, but he is unwilling to admit them into the inner circle of conservatism. Thus his pessimism about the future of conservatism can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy, paralleling the perennial death wish of traditional Republicanism. For in the end the mere defense of property, or even of semiabstractions like liberty, will not be enough to sustain the effort which would be necessary to reverse 50 years of the kind of deleterious social policy that Nisbet deplores. Neither will a mainly negative reaction to especially egregious exercises in liberal social engineering. Such a movement, to have any chance of success, must have a spiritual heart, and at present it seems as though that heart can only be supplied by the kinds of religious enthusiasts Nisbet seems to want to keep on the margins of his civilization. □

LIBERAL CULTURE

Crime & Babble

Time, that haven for demi-intellectuals, ran not long ago a cover story on the death penalty. According to *Time's* publisher, the youthful author has made an epochal discovery. He noticed the "palpable sense of the daily, interminable monotony of living in prison." In a related story, the editors of *Time* poke abolitionist fun (opponents of death penalty call themselves "abolitionists" these days) at England's 19th-century bad manners in dealing with crime:

> England's response to the bewildering social evils caused by the Industrial Revolution was unique. . . . The English meted out the death penalty for more than 200 offenses, including stealing turnips, associating with gypsies, cutting down a tree or picking pockets. 'Hanging days' were public holidays.

However, in another part of *Time's* treatise we can read that England's crime rate today is "amazingly low"—*Time's* expression—at 1.1 murders per 100,000 people. (U.S. homicide rate is 9.4 per 100,000.) Obviously, *Time's* editorial brains do not correlate these two pieces of information—one from the previous age and one from ours. They just do not bring into mutual relation two elements of their own narration—the mark of mental underdevelopment. That's why *Time* is a paradise for a demi-intelligent editor and a cerebral exercise manual for a quarter-intelligent reader. □

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Contours of the Text

Elizabeth W. Bruss: *Beautiful Theories: The Spectacle of Discourse in Contemporary Criticism;* Johns Hopkins University Press; Baltimore.

Roland Barthes: *A Barthes Reader;* Hill & Wang; New York.

Roland Barthes: *Empire of Signs;* Hill & Wang; New York.

Susan Sontag: *A Susan Sontag Reader;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Gary S. Vasilash

An important change in thinking occurred because of Albert Einstein and his theories (special in 1905 and general in 1915) of relativity. Some assume that developments in physics have little to do with literature; they are wrong. Before and after Lucretius writers have been wondering about the "stuff" of nature, about what makes man and his world. Einstein's contribution to literature and literary theory is not, as many think, the idea that "all things are relative," but the idea that can be formulated in the following manner: There is no such thing as a privileged observer. Of course, Einstein wasn't talking about literary texts, but space-time. Still, his idea gained currency among writers— whose subjects, after all, are not unlike those of physicists—who gained knowledge from him about point of view. The writers came to realize that it is increasingly futile—or even absurd—to say that something is a certain way and no other. Another physicist who must be brought in is lesser known than Einstein but no less important: Max Planck. Planck is considered the father of quantum mechanics, as he discovered "quanta," or energy packets, in 1900. Although it does grievous damage to the subject, it is necessary to simplify the relevant aspect of quantum mechanics. Suffice it to assert that physicists ultimately discovered that their very observation of something—such as the nature of light (i.e., wave or particle)—affected what they saw. Thus to observe something, even under the most scrupulous and exacting conditions, is to change it. Once again, it must be stated that Planck and those responsible for the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics (1927) were talking about subatomic particles, not novels. Still, the model they proposed managed to manifest itself in literary discourse (e.g., in the self-referential novel). The "two cultures" is a nonsensical category (Barthes: "Literature works in the interstices of science"). What some literary theorists came to believe is that by writing about something, they changed the nature of their subject: certainly the words on the pages of a book aren't altered, but their meaning is modified. There is, however, no one-to-one relationship between developments in physics and literature. Indeed, in her comprehensive examination of modern critical theory, *Beautiful Theories,* Elizabeth W. Bruss doesn't bring up Einstein or Planck. But just as Nietzsche, Saussure, and Wittgenstein have had their effects, so too have the physicists.

It's difficult to make an uncategorical statement about modern literature or literary theory. Indeed, even the term *modern* is called into question, as some think that *postmodern* is correct. One thing is clear: much of the writing of the second half of the 20th century is distinctly different from that which was done before, with few exceptions. Not all of the causes for this state of affairs can be found in the sciences or philosophy. For example, in the 60's, revolts broke out on campuses throughout the West. While many of the students claimed that their target was a specific one, namely, American involvement in Southeast Asia, Bruss correctly noted that the rebellion was against authority in general. In English departments, wherein enrollment figures were declining, the question faced was: Who says? A professor who made an appeal to authority could find his classroom surrounded by placard-bearing youth. One way out was to provide a response or an interpretation based on a theoretical model instead of one taken from a learned person. Said Elizabeth Bruss:

> Literary theory might . . . serve as the missing common background for a divided student body and, being an artificial language with no identification with any particular group, might prove more palatable to all. At the same time, theory could perhaps provide a stay against relativism, a principled way of making educational distinctions and weighing artistic merits, without recourse to arbitrary authority (at a moment when students were nothing if not antiauthoritarian) or to the now tarnished standard of the Great Tradition.

This is not to state that student protests and falling enrollments forced the hands of respected scholars, but, just as quantum mechanics, the philosophies of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, the linguistics of Saussure, the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, and other influences were in the air and oxidizing the standards of the New Criticism and other models, so too were the unrest and the economic factor. It must be stressed that this state of ferment existed at colleges and universities throughout the West. It was most potent in France. Roland Barthes was to say nine years after the massive strikes and protests that occurred primarily in Paris, "This shift [in semiology] occurred because the intellectual community has changed, if only through the break of May '68," and ". . . May '68 has revealed the crisis in our teaching." France is the home of many of the current literary models.

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While much literary theory of today seems to imply a hermetic state, it's clear that a large number of external factors affect it. However, on their way to constructing theories with "an artificial language," which is basically composed of fragments seized from the sciences, several theorists eschewed clarity and adopted a style not unlike that used by economists or petrochemical engineers. Indeed, graphs and charts are not uncommon in literary essays. Literary theory has become cryptic; reading an essay is often like busting a code. Bruss pointed out that contemporary literature faces an "unprecedented crisis of audience." People are turning to other mediums. Cable TV and home computers are becoming increasingly accessible while much literature is becoming increasingly opaque. Literary theory once acted as a means which could be used to help clear things up. It still does, but it is getting to the point where the reader needs a guide to help him interpret the interpretative model. Bruss thought that what is happening is that literary theory is becoming a new form of literature. She wrote:

> [I]f the reading public as a whole is shrinking, if literature is increasingly relegated to the schools as something to 'be studied'—if, in a word, the majority of readers are now scholars (whether students or professional academics)—then the claims of literary theory to be our representative literary genre became stronger still. What better inspiration could a literature of theory have than an audience composed of theorists and critics?

If the audience is small, it's getting smaller as readers are being alienated by the immensity of the strata of texts that must be bored through to get to "literature." In *Beautiful Theories* Bruss uses Susan Sontag, William Gass, Harold Bloom, and Roland Barthes as representatives of current theorists. All four are intellectuals who should act to further mankind's understanding. If they were to limit themselves to what many perceive as obfuscating theory—which it isn't, at least not entirely, and which they don't, as will be shown—then literature would aspire to sterility and the audience would inevitably become exhausted.

One of the problems that intellectuals face in modern society, particularly those who concentrate on matters like literary theory, as opposed to, say, political science or economics, is that they are isolated, even if they work toward clarity. With this isolation comes a feeling that one's influence on a macroscopic level is microscopic. Literature is a public gesture. Often, those who study those gestures feel a need to make their own. One option is to write fiction, which many theorists and critics do with varying degrees of success. William Gass, for example, has penned fictions including *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* and *Omensetter's Luck,* and Harold Bloom wrote a fantasy, *The Flight to Lucifer.* But both men are still considered to be primarily theorists, and their fictional texts are correctly judged as nothing more than a working out of their theoretical propositions. Thus the effect of their public gestures is diminished. The key, then, is to gain at least a modicum of distance from the purely literary (or from what is conventionally thought to be literary) and so achieve wider recognition.

Frederic Jameson, in *The Prison-House of Language,* points out that Roland Barthes, although "primarily thought of as a literary critic," "pursues what is basically a sociological investigation of the imaginary objects and culture-institutions of a civilization saturated with advertising and ideology." An examination of *A Barthes Reader* bears this out. While the late M. Barthes is generally considered to be *the* structuralist literary critic (Lévi-Strauss is the one in anthropology, Foucault in history, etc.), Barthes didn't limit his examination of signs to merely literary texts—though his pieces on Gide, Baudelaire, Racine, and others are intriguing—but he looked at the world from which people draw their coordinates. Thus, he examined professional wrestling, he compared the faces of Greta Garbo and Audrey Hepburn circa 1955 ("The face of Garbo is an Idea, that of Hepburn an Event"), he divined the "meaning" of the Eiffel Tower. Several pages in *Empire of Signs,* a text about a "system" he calls Japan, deal with such quotidian subjects as food: "The harmony between Oriental food and chopsticks cannot be merely functional, instrumental; the foodstuffs are

In the Mail

A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976 **by Robert Booth Fowler; Wm. B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids MI.** Proponents of Christ meet Caesar.

The Southern Review **(Winter 1983) coedited by Donald E. Stanford and Lewis P. Simpson; Louisiana State University; Baton Rouge.** *With essays on figures including Mallarmé and Lya* de Putti, one wonders: why *Southern?*

Who Owns America?: A New Declaration of Independence **edited by Herbert Agar and Allen Tate; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** Do the fugitives and associates of 1936 have meaning for 1983? Could be: President Reagan was fond of bringing up FDR not long ago.

Laurels **(Fall 1982) edited by Vincent Milligan; American Society of the French Legion of Honor; New York.** Essays on bandits, women and war, and hashish—if nothing else, an interesting combination.

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cut up so they can be grasped by sticks, but also the chopsticks exist because the foodstuffs are cut into small pieces, one and the same movement, one and the same form transcends the substance and its utensil: division." In an essay in *Mythologies,* "Myth Today," Barthes provides an explanation of the trinity of structuralism: the signifier, the signified, and the sign; he seized upon a cover of *Paris-Match* and a sentence from a Latin grammar book to do it. Fashion—specifically the wearing of a sweater and a leather jacket—is used in "The Imagination of the Sign" to illuminate the syntagmatic relation; Barthes, however, showed himself to be not adverse to using jargon, as in "garment systems."

Barthes isn't any less of a theorist when he turns away from literary texts. Indeed, the "turning away" metaphor might be improper in the context of Barthes as structuralist. Structuralism is (though there's wide disagreement about any definition) an approach wherein a system, be it a novel or a social arrangement, which consists of form and content, is broken down into its constituent elements, which are then examined in themselves and as they relate to the whole. Form is considered more important than content, in the conventional sense of those terms, though form is shown to have a content. The importance of surfaces is stressed, as the surface is said to be so obvious that it's often overlooked, as in Poe's "The Purloined Letter." *What* the text says is not as important as *how* it says it—at least in theory. The word *text,* which is ubiquitous in modern criticism of all types, is important here. As Walter J. Ong points out in *Orality and Literacy, text* has "a root meaning 'to weave,'" and so it is, "in absolute terms, more compatible etymologically with oral utterance than is 'literature,' which refers to letters etymologically *(literae)* of the alphabet." Texts, as Fr. Ong shows, should not be thought of simply as those things found between covers. So, it can be stated that Barthes was simply "reading texts" when he examined clothing or the Eiffel Tower.

While it is true, as Jameson points out, that Barthes is considered "primarily" a literary critic, Barthes's writings show that the category is a convenient but not a perspicacious one. Barthes was elected to the Chair of Literary Semiology at the Collège de France; he presented his inaugural lecture in January 1977. In it, he provided a review of his career (it was to last just three more years). Barthes said in the address: "It seemed to me (around 1954) that a science of signs might stimulate social criticism. . . . It was a question, in short, of understanding (or of describing) how a society produces stereotypes, i.e., triumphs of artifice, which it then consumes as innate meanings, i.e., tri-

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

Ideology & Our Daily Bread

"A specter is haunting the American left—the specter of conservatism. On every front—political, social, cultural—left-liberals are in retreat, shaken by a series of reverses and embittered because many of their quondam comrades, impressed more by the arguments of neoconservatism than by the platitudes of socialism, have defected to the enemy. And even those who have not wavered in their commitment to the left seem to be convinced that there will be no liberal revival until the totalitarian temptation, to which so many left-wing intellectuals have succumbed, is finally overcome."

—from "Smoke Gets in Their Eyes"
by Lee Congdon

"Plato envisaged the decline of the ideal society as related to a flaw in breeding and in education. . . . the latter is most suggestive. Is it possible that the young rebels of the 60's and 70's were conditioned by their upbringing for the role they would play? Perhaps the children of the World War II generation—sheltered from the Depression and war experience of their parents—were sheltered from life itself. . . . Nothing was too good for this generation; 'no' was not in its vocabulary. But perhaps it failed to learn discipline, restraint, self-control, and limit. Perhaps it failed to grasp the tragedy of human existence."

—from "The Historical Tricycle"
by Daniel J. O'Neil

Also:

***Opinions* & Views—Commendables—In Focus**
Perceptibles—Waste of Money—The American Proscenium
Stage—Screen—Art—Music—Correspondence
Liberal Culture—Social Register—Journalism
In My Solitude—Polemics & Exchanges

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umphs of Nature. Semiology (my semiology, at least) is generated by an intolerance of this mixture of bad faith and good conscience which characterizes the general morality." Barthes set out to examine much more than novels and plays; his objective wasn't simply to put down words about words. He spoke of being influenced by Saussure, Sartre, and Brecht: a linguist, an existentialist, and a smelly communist. He was associated with the *Tel Quel* group. Thus Barthes is commonly considered to be a radical. In many ways he was. However, the stance he took wasn't necessarily leftist in orientation. An essay about Voltaire, "The Last Happy Writer," opens as follows:

> What have we in common, today, with Voltaire? From a modern point of view, his philosophy is outmoded. . . . [A]theists no longer throw themselves at the feet of deists, who moreover no longer exist. Dialectics has killed off Manicheanism, and we rarely discuss the ways of Providence. . . . I was about to say: there is no longer an Inquisition. This is wrong, of course. What has disappeared is the theater of persecution, not persecution itself: the *auto-da-fé* has been subtilized into a police operation, the stake has become a concentration camp, discreetly ignored by its neighbors.

Isn't it possible to apply this description to the Soviet Union and the way it appears to many in the West?

Barthes's role, as evidenced by his tentative probings into the environment as described by sociology and literature, seems to have been to call attention to how things that aren't ordinarily recognized as influential actually are (e.g., the surface of a text). That Barthes was often guilty of expressing himself in jargon is undeniable, as is the fact that he is typically less than morally sensitive in his texts. Still, the approaches he developed (early Barthes is not the same as the later product) can be useful, even in areas beyond the conventional boundaries of the literary.

Barthes, as Susan Sontag perceptively points out in her introduction to *A Barthes Reader,* was primarily an aesthete; he remained one throughout his wide-ranging investigation. Other literary theorists and critics become much more like politicians and propagandists than anything else when they move into the wider world. As Paul Hollander describes in *Political Pilgrims,* there is almost an endemic dissatisfaction with the status quo felt by Western intellectuals that leads them to sing the praises of China, Cuba, or even Albania (the Soviet Union is generally "out" at present). Hollander notes that idealism and a feeling of being overlooked in their own countries contribute to the pilgrimages and subsequent paeans. I suggest that the before-mentioned isolation and feeling of being ineffectual is also part of it: the literary theorists want to express themselves in forums beyond the pages of *Diacritics, Glyph,* or even the *New York Review of Books.* A question that arises is why the public listens to such observations: after all, few would be willing to believe or even read a medical doctor's observations on astronomy or an astronomer's view of health care. That theorists and critics are read and believed seems to indicate that there are indeed signs everywhere and that those who can make deep readings of books can apply that same methodology to reading foreign societies. So *Esquire, Harper's,* and other magazines feature articles by scholars and writers on the state of whatever, and major newspapers solicit comments from them on world affairs. Everyone is then happy—in theory. Some, including Susan Sontag, do better when they stick to aesthetics.

Susan Sontag's repertoire is a vast one. She has written novels, short stories, theory, and criticism, made films, and her introductions to the works of others are legion. Sontag is truly a daughter of less prolific writers, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Walter Benjamin, at least in terms of her style. That is, the propositional forms of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is often evident. Benjamin thought that little things, fragments, were important and indicative of larger entities; Sontag examines small things, as best exemplified in her "Notes on Camp." Her fiction is at its best when she presents an organized series (Wittgenstein) of fragments (Benjamin) rather than when she sustains a narrative. Thus, her short stories typically have an allusiveness that is more satisfying than the oppressive plodding of her novels, *The Benefactor* and *Death Kit.* The same is true of her essays. The use of what can be called the ordered fragment is very characteristic of much modern discourse; Sontag's handling is among the best. She has a facility that permits the reader to more fully assemble what she provides. In a sense, her writing is often not unlike cubism: for some, a Braque is nothing more than bric-a-brac; the synthesis and cohesion escape them.

If Susan Sontag is known for one essay, it's her "Trip to Hanoi." It was originally published in *Esquire* in June and July of 1968 and was reprinted in *Styles of Radical Will* in 1969. (*Styles of Radical Will* also includes her "What's Happening in America (1966)," wherein she proclaims, "The white race *is* the cancer of human history.") "Trip to Hanoi" is not included in *A Susan Sontag Reader,* undoubtedly due to space limitations. According to a story in the *New York Times Book Review* ("Susan Sontag: Past, Present and Future" by Charles Ruas, 24 October '82), "She wishes she could have included 'Trip to Hanoi,' if only as a gesture of defiance against the present piecemeal rejection of the 60's and growing cultural conservatism." That wish indicates that Sontag has strength of character and that she doesn't disown her past, as many writers are wont to do, especially those who have written similar pieces. "Trip to Hanoi" is among the most idiotic and insensitive essays ever written by any writer. If Sontag was considered the intellectual "Hanoi" Jane Fonda because of it, then Ms. Fonda is mistreated, since she can at least cite her less-than-massive cerebral

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capacity as an excuse.

Sontag went to North Vietnam when it was an act of defiance—legally and morally—to do so. Although she opens her essay implying that she will be a critical observer and reporter, any rigor rapidly becomes naiveté. For example, she spots what she is told is the grave of an American fighter pilot in a village. She *knows* it to be one because it has pieces of what she assumes to be chunks of the downed F-105 on top; such knowledge brings her philosophical training into question. She is astounded at the existence of the mound, and posits the villagers "quietly" taking up their shovels to "tastefully arrange his grave." She assumes that "the villagers thought burying the pilot was a beautiful (they would probably say 'humane') thing to do." It doesn't occur to her that the "grave" (it could have been a land fill) might simply be a showpiece that would sink less skeptical American observers than she under waves of sympathy. "Taste" is one of Sontag's key concerns —she finds it everywhere, even in the national celebration of Ho Chi Minh's birthday (it expresses the people's "delicacy of . . . feeling toward him")—and to question the kind hosts about their motives would have been in bad taste. But in other instances, when it is used against the American war efforts, tastelessness is appropriate, as evidenced in a passage describing how "American planes have become virtual mines in the sky." Sontag details how each plane that's "bagged" is "methodically taken apart" and so yields things from sandals to combs, from jewelry to surgical instruments. She doesn't mention weapons, nor does she wonder about the fate of the pilot. One can only assume that she thinks the pilot is either in a well-made grave or a lucky prisoner of war. I use the word *lucky* because Sontag states: "The North Vietnamese genuinely care about the welfare of the hundreds of captured American pilots and give them bigger rations than the Vietnamese population gets 'because they're bigger than we are,' as a Vietnamese army officer told me, 'and they're used to more meat than we are.' " Sontag circa 1968 might even have believed that the North Vietnamese had arranged to ship in White Castle hamburgers for the hungry imperialists. While a litany of Sontag's remarkable stupidity in "Trip to Hanoi" could continue unabated for pages, the foregoing should suffice to show that literary intellectuals don't always read things outside their area of expertise with any clarity.

If Susan Sontag is known for one oral presentation, it's the one she made at a meeting in New York in February 1982. In the before-mentioned *New York Times Book Review* article Sontag recounts the statement that made her former liberal and radical friends apoplectic:

> The statement at Town Hall that was considered the most insolent and provocative was: Imagine the preposterous case of somebody who read only the *Reader's Digest* between 1950 and 1970, and somebody else who read only *The Nation* between 1950 and 1970. Who would be getting more truth about the nature of Communism? There's no doubt it would have been the *Reader's Digest* reader, and for a specific reason, which I'm sorry I didn't explain, because that too has been misunderstood. It's because the *Reader's Digest* was open to a lot of immigrant writers and their testimony about life in the Soviet Union.

There is commendable truth in her observation. But what is more preposterous than the case of her fictional readers is the fact that Sontag didn't state her case until 1982, even though she claims in the same article, "[M]y political views began changing 14 years ago." Is there an anti-"Trip to Hanoi"? No. But one may emerge, as Sontag is now the target of vituperative attacks launched by her former comrades.

Sontag, when staying close to her métier, has shown herself to be cognizant of the vicious inhumanity of totalitarian regimes. For example, in her evisceration of Riefenstahl, Sontag attacks the debilitating effect of totalitarianism on art. Sontag notes, "Fascist art glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness, it glamorizes death." She goes on to say, "features of fascist art proliferate in the official art of communist countries. . . . The tastes for the monumental and for mass obeisance to the hero are common to both fascist and communist art, reflecting the view of all totalitarian regimes that art has the function of 'immortalizing' its leaders and doctrines." Clearly, that's the task of malevolent propaganda, not art. She states in an interview conducted in 1975: "the moralism of *serious* communist societies not only wipes out the autonomy of the aesthetic but makes it impossible to produce art (in the modern sense) at all. A six-week trip to China in 1973 convinced me . . . that the autonomy of the aesthetic is something to be protected, and cherished, as indispensable nourishment to intelligence." Obviously, by this time Sontag was reevaluating what she presented in 1968 as the joys of oppression.

The 1975 interview was published in *Salmagundi* (Fall 1975–Winter 1976), a quarterly. It is the kind of forum that has only a limited effect due to its specialized audience. Fortunately, the interview is collected in *A Susan Sontag Reader*. In it, Sontag, seven years before the Town Hall meeting, makes a statement that foreshadows her developing sensitivity to reality:

> And why shouldn't people be naturally conservative? That the past necessarily weighs more on the axis of human consciousness is perhaps a greater liability to the individual than to society, but how could it be otherwise? Where is the scandal?

If anything is reproachable, it's the following. Susan Sontag has been on the scene for 20 years. Current photos of her show a gracefully aging, middle-aged woman. She has accumulated a history. Why has it taken her so long to grow up?

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200 Years Without Tradition

Marie B. Hecht: *Odd Destiny: The Life of Alexander Hamilton;* Macmillan; New York.

Lou Cannon: *Reagan;* G.P. Putnam's Sons; New York.

by Daniel J. O'Neil

Together these two books provide valuable insight into the nature of American conservatism. The Hecht book tells persuasively the story of Alexander Hamilton. It is a fascinating tale, telling of his illegitimate birth, his youth of poverty and struggle, his college days, his experience in the American Revolution, his relationship with George Washington, his role at the Constitutional Convention and in the ratification battle, his prominence in Federalist politics, his tenure as Secretary of the Treasury, his economic and developmental schemes, and finally his tragic death. It is a political success story of a man who contributed vitally to the American conservative mold. The Cannon book tells a not-dissimilar story of Ronald Reagan. Again we encounter a self-made man and read of his youth in small-town Illinois, his college days, his early broadcasting jobs, his acting career and union involvement, his venture into California politics, and finally his Presidential triumph. This, too, is a political success story. Hamilton emerges as an anglophile who stressed the primacy of the economic realm, linked the Federalists to the wealthy, promoted industrial development and sought centralized government. Reagan emerges as the successful communicator who champions traditional virtues and aspires to contain the welfare state. In power he prefers to isolate the ideologues and govern pragmatically and collegially.

These books tell a great deal about American conservatism; but, more importantly, they expose its deficiencies. The norm for philosophical conservatism has been a tradition extending from Aristotle through Cicero, the medieval scholastics, Richard Hooker, and culminating in the thought of Edmund Burke. It is a tradition that stresses a pessimistic view of human nature, an organic rather than a mechanical perception of society, an evolutionary concept of change, a search for moderation and balance which admits that politics often involves selecting the lesser evil, and a commitment to pluralism and subsidiarity in decision-making. It is permeated throughout by a sense of the tragedy of human existence. While some of these concerns are found in the thought of Hamilton and Reagan, their thrust is absent. The deficiency stems from the emphasis and balance, from the hierarchy of values, rather than from the ingredients of American conservatism.

American political conservatism seems to lack that pessimistic view of human nature so vital to the conservative ethos. It denies a primacy to that suspicion of flawed humanity that is represented by the Judeo-Christian parable of the Fall and which is so detrimental to all forms of utopianism. Consequently, there is seldom any cognizance of limits or of the probability of failure. Hamilton recognized the ancient insight only regarding the masses, while Reagan, the perpetual optimist, seems never to have grappled with this mystery. Thus Reagan and other American conservatives (and their liberal brethren) are often shocked by current events.

The organic view of society, with its deference to tradition and continuity, seems muted in American political conservatism. Both Hamilton and Reagan perceive society primarily in mechanical rather than organic terms—as something to be tampered with and manipulated. Both seem to espouse the progressive interpretation of history. Both are intensely fascinated by economic questions, and view the environment as inviting exploration. Missing is the philosophical conservative's deference to nature, sense of the chain of being—linking the living, the dead, and unborn—and awe before the mystery of the universe. Indeed, Hamilton is a child of the Enlightenment; he fought in a revolution, participated in constructing the Great Charter, promoted political centralization, and opposed the most traditional region of the new nation. Reagan offers a program that promises a simple solution to the insoluble—a tax cut linked to a balanced budget and a strengthened military. His values and concerns reflect those of the business world.

American political conservatism seems only nominally supportive of the pillars of pluralism—family, community, church. They are acclaimed during political campaigns, but subsequent efforts to bolster them always end up on the back burner. In contemporary America concern for such loyalties has often been stigmatized as reactionary, puritanical, and/or prudish, as it is frequently coupled with the feared Moral Majority. Hamilton and Reagan, like most politicians, appeal to these basic loyalties, but one suspects that they rank low in their

"This is not a profound book, but . . . it is easy to see how unprofound President Reagan is."

—*The Progressive*

"He [Reagan] has two strikes against him: he appears to be an ordinary middle-class American, and he holds beliefs . . . that seem ridiculous to the mainstream media."

—*The Nation*

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hierarchy of political concerns.

American political conservatism seems to lack philosophical conservatism's sense of the tragedy of human existence. Our business-oriented conservative party optimistically sought to populate and to develop a continent—and succeeded. It envisaged a society of virtually unlimited opportunity and mobility. For generations it dreamed of the New Jerusalem isolated from Europe's sordid history. Hence one seldom finds in American political conservatism the belief that man will struggle only to taste ultimate defeat; or that man's most impressive accomplishments are destined to oblivion. Instead, with both Hamilton and Reagan, one finds Horatio Alger success stories and the tendency to generalize from limited experience.

Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America* argues persuasively that the dilemma of American conservatism is that to the degree that it conserves a tradition, it conserves a liberal tradition. He argues that the U.S. is founded upon Lockean liberal assumptions. The credo of the founding fathers involved an optimistic, atomized view of man, a contractual-mechanical concept of government, and an obsessive commitment to the sanctity of private property. Lockean liberalism justified the American Revolution and became, with its victory, the official orthodoxy. That liberalism was intelligible in a society that lacked a feudal tradition, had been settled by immigrants, and seemed to possess unlimited resources. Thus American conservatives were put in the peculiar position of conserving a Lockean liberal tradition that had acquired establishment status due to its revolutionary success. Consequently, the political conservatism that emerged in the U.S. would have to differ considerably from the philosophical variety in both concern and emphasis. The Hecht and Cannon books seem to substantiate Hartz's thesis.

The America of the future will be very different from the worlds that molded Hamilton and Reagan. It will be in all probability an arena of nuclear threat, limited resources, cultural conflict, and general decline. The unprecedented prosperity from 1945 to 1975 may one day seem an aberration as it becomes increasingly difficult to compete with the newly reindustrialized nations. America as the workshop of the world may become but a faded memory. How relevant to that world will be the Lockean liberalism with its optimism, its individualism, its faith in progress?

What perhaps is needed to face such a future is an infusion of Burkean conservatism into the American conservative tradition. The Burkean pessimism, sense of mystery, recognition of evil and tragedy, and commitment to tradition and community might serve as a helpful antidote. The conservative love affair with the business community—which has never really been conservative—might be questioned and more natural allies sought. The Burkean organismic emphasis on subsidiarity might foster a new concern for man's future environment. The Burkean emphasis on subsidiarity might inspire a renewed defense of family, locale, and church. The Burkean suspicion of bigness might encourage a new perspective on business, as well as on labor and government. American conservatism would thus link with a much older philosophical tradition.

Possibly the conservative philosophical ethos has never been effectively represented in American politics. It is probably in the realm of American literature, with writers like Melville, Faulkner, O'Connor, and Percy, that one would discover that ethos. Indeed, these two books indicate the poverty of American political conservatism. The first describes Alexander Hamilton, the great modernizer. But modernization/development is a liberal, not a conservative, obsession. The second describes Ronald Reagan, the great communicator. But contemporary communication impresses the philosophical conservative with its simplicity and vulgarity. Communication with the massses is a liberal, not a conservative, obsession. Unfortunately our Founding Fathers drank freely from the waters of the Enlightenment. Our venerated documents, our unquestioned myths, our political institutions are saturated with that spirit. But to the philosophical conservative, the Enlightenment and its fruits are viewed with suspicion; hence the tension between philosophical conservatism and the American experience.

America's lack of a genuine philosophical conservative tradition leaves many to opt for the lesser evil. To them the two established political parties represent merely 19th-century liberalism vs. 20th-century liberalism. The GOP represents those who become affluent in the private sector, while the Democratic Party represents the "new class" that lives regally off the public sector. What American conservatism needs is an affirmation of philosophical conservatism: neither a Hamilton nor a Reagan, but an American Burke who will adapt the ancient wisdom to the American predicament. □

In the Mail

The 'Art' of Investing While Collecting **by Robert Johanningmeier; Art & Communications; Carlsbad, NM.** Somehow, "art" purchased for monetary, not aesthetic, appreciation loses its glimmer, though this investor/author disagrees.

Hoover Institution Report 1982; **Stanford University; Stanford, CA.** Few things founded in 1919 are as far from retirement age as this spry institution.

The Nature of Public Philosophy **by Richard J. Bishirjian; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** Public philosophy: as is clear, chaos is a consequence of ignoring its true form.

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The Literature of Engagement

Mario Vargas Llosa: ***Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter;*** **Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

María Luisa Bombal: ***New Islands and Other Stories;*** **Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

Manuel Puig: ***Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages;*** **Random House; New York.**

by Stephen L. Tanner

North America knows Latin America imperfectly. Many Americans condescendingly view Central and South America as a collection of nearly indistinguishable underdeveloped banana republics. They wonder why those people down there are so backward. Didn't they have the same opportunities as we did to develop the New World? And why the devil don't they have a stable democratic government like ours? This condescension toward Latin American economics and politics has unfortunately strangled interest in Latin American culture. Carlos Fuentes insists that Latin American culture has maintained an uninterrupted line contrasting violently with the atrocious balkanization of its political life. In the United States, we know considerably more about the volatile and oppressive politics than about the line of culture.

Even our knowledge of the geography is sketchy. When I returned from living in Brazil for two years, a number of presumably educated people asked if I had learned Spanish and eaten lots of tortillas. They were surprised when I told them that one out of three Latin Americans is a Brazilian who speaks Portuguese and that although I had discovered many German, French, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, and Lebanese restaurants, I had never encountered a Mexican one. They were equally surprised when I told them that Brazil is larger than the continental United States and paraded before them those usual geographical statistics calculated to produce mild astonishment.

Professor Tanner is a frequent contributor to these pages.

And if North Americans know little about Latin American geography, they know even less about Latin American literature. But this situation is gradually changing, largely because of a frequently mentioned "boom" in Latin American literature. This "boom" (a word coined by the Latin American writers themselves) is due in part, according to one scholar of Latin American writing, to "the dramatic increase in publishing since World War II, a greatly increased readership (population, literacy and educational advances), intensified nationalism and continentalism, and better communications." It manifested itself in Latin America more than a decade ago, but because of translation lag has only recently registered itself in the United States. Now an increasing number of English translations are appearing, many in paperback. Certain Latin American authors have been energetic in seeing to it that their works are translated and made available to the United States. Moreover, the recent awarding of the Nobel Prize to the Colombian Gabriel Garcia Márquez is likely to stimulate even more interest in Latin American literature.

The Peruvian Vargas Llosa has become internationally famous as one of the major authors of the boom in Spanish American fiction. Both as novelist and critic he has gained worldwide recognition. In a 1977 University of Oklahoma conference devoted to his work, he provided an illuminating analysis of the Latin American writer's situation. In that analysis, he describes a moral imposition impelling Latin American writers to social and political commitment. To be a writer in the United States or Western Europe, he says, means to assume the personal responsibility of producing literature that through artistic values and originality enriches the language and culture of one's country. In most Latin American countries, on the contrary, being a writer means, at the same time, to assume social responsibility. In addition to developing a personal literary work, the writer must, in writings and actions, contribute actively in the solution of economic, political, and cultural problems of his society. The extreme conditions of underdeveloped and politically unstable or oppressive countries generate this demand. "To be an artist, only an artist, can become, in our countries," he says, "a kind of moral crime, a political sin." All Latin American literature is marked by this situation, he insists, and it must be taken into consideration if one is to understand the distinctive nature of that literature.

In Latin American countries, according to Vargas Llosa, the press, TV, radio, and even in some cases universities deliberately turn away from what is actually happening in society. This creates a vacuum that has been filled by literature. And this is not a recent phenomenon. From its beginnings, Latin American literature has been a substitute for social science. The most representative and genuine description of the real problems of Latin America is to be found in its literature. Social concern and good sentiments do not, of course, guarantee good literature. In fact, as Vargas Llosa points out, the contrary is true in many cases. Novels or poems written in the heat of a current situation, in militant passion, in denunciation of a social evil often lack what he feels are essential in a work of art: richness of expression and technical originality. Many Latin American writers with a strong sense of social responsibility sacrifice their vocation on the altar of politics.

Even writers who do not begin with a

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strong social commitment become politically conscious as they practice their vocation. They inevitably encounter the handicaps and miseries of underdevelopment, which are not confined to peasants, workers, or minorities. Illiteracy, censorship, cultural deprivation are obstacles for the writer, whatever his class or social philosophy. Consequently, the Latin American writer is pressured in both obvious and subtle ways toward social commitment. There are some positive aspects in this situation. The commitment keeps writers in touch with living reality, with the experiences of people, and it discourages the pursuit of esoteric experimentation and forms of expression disassociated from real experience that characterizes some of the literature in developed countries. But the situation also presents many dangers. The function and practice of literature become distorted when literature is viewed mainly as a means for social and political aims. And many writers, after all, are not prepared to deal with social and political problems. In addition, the door is opened for unfortunate pressures on evaluation. How can one condemn as an artistic failure a novel that pointedly protests an obvious social injustice without being accused of complicity in that injustice?

Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter certainly does not sacrifice rich expression and technical originality for the sake of social commitment. Indeed, it is devoid of morals or messages and reflects a greater concern with the nature of writing than with social or political problems. Set in Lima during the 1950's, the novel has two threads that subtly create perspective for each other. One is the story of 18-year-old Mario, who works for a radio station and writes short stories while he studies law. He falls in love with his Aunt Julia, a divorcée in her thirties. Although Julia is an aunt by marriage, their affair is a family scandal and the road to marriage is filled with obstacles. The other thread is the story of Pedro Camacho, a peculiar and astonishingly

prolific writer of radio soap operas. In alternating chapters we watch Mario and Julia moving through complications toward marriage while Camacho gradually loses control of his soap operas and his sanity as his stories and characters become scrambled and transformed into one another and he eventually begins killing off the bewildering jumble of characters by catastrophic fires and earthquakes.

The novel is highly inventive because the scriptwriter thread is developed by the author providing episodes from a half-dozen programs (written in narrative prose rather than dialogue). These chapters are packed with bizarre characters, sordid and melodramatic situations, and overblown diction. They all build up to a climax and end with questions: Would he shoot? Would he castrate himself? and the like. Perhaps the most surprising thing about the novel is that it is largely autobiographical. Vargas Llosa did marry his Aunt Julia when he was 18 and working in a radio station, and he did know such a scriptwriter.

The novel propounds no particular ideas. Instead, Vargas Llosa draws our attention to such issues as the relation between autobiography and fiction, serious and popular literature, soap operas and real life, the writer and the writers within his writing. He sets these relationships vibrating and allows readers to draw conclusions if they wish. He does little to determine those conclusions.

María Luisa Bombal's *New Islands* is a slim volume of five short stories (written in the 1940's) prefaced by a half-page endorsement from Jorge Luis Borges. Four of the stories are about women frustrated in love, usually because they are bound to unloving husbands. The style is accurately likened by one reviewer to "that excessive yet faintly anemic narrative style which runs from George Sand through Joyce Carol Oates." Spectral mists, ominous clouds obscuring the moon, enervating silence, dream atmosphere, imaginary erotic obsessions, mysterious primal forces and affinities —these are the basic elements of the stories. Some of the scenes are hauntingly evocative, but on the whole it is rather slight stuff.

The translator refers to Bombal as "the most important Latin American woman novelist of this century." Most readers of *New Islands* will be puzzled by this praise, especially when they discover how little else she published. Whatever the degree of her importance, its basis seems to lie in her treatment of the feminine mind, particularly the longings, obsessions, and frustrations within its inner reaches. Obviously the book has been published now mainly to exploit the current women's-studies market. The dust jacket plugs the stories as "the precursors of a modern feminist sensibility, a new kind of writing about women by women." There is poignancy in the situation of these women destined to live passively and decorously in submission to patriarchal society while their hidden selves seek escape in dreams and erotic fantasies. But the romantic self-indulgence and misty preoccupation with feminine erotic yearning resembles the stuff of Harlequin romances more than an illuminating probe of female personality.

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Written in English and set in New York City, Manuel Puig's *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* is scarcely representative of Latin American fiction. The story, told exclusively in dialogue, brings into intimate relationship a 74-year-old Argentine and a 36-year-old American. Ramirez, exiled from Argentina for political reasons, has been brought to the United States by a human-rights group and is an invalid in a Greenwich Village hospital. He apparently has forgotten his past and lost his capacity for certain emotional responses. Larry, with a Ph.D. in history and an attraction to Freudian and Marxian theory, has made a mess of his life. Divorced, unemployed, living in a filthy apartment in the Village, he accepts the job of pushing Mr. Ramirez's wheelchair. A situation of mutual dependence develops. Ramirez, with an obsessive hunger for vicarious experience, pumps and manipulates Larry until the younger man objects: "Sometimes I feel like you're trying to suck the life out of me." Larry, besides needing the job, discovers coded in the old man's books a prison journal (the first words of which provide the novel's title). Editing this document would further his academic career.

The relationship is complicated by pride, guilt, and deceit, and the conversations become a complex of father-son relationships, indeed, of family relationships. It is compelling reading, but ultimately bewildering. It is difficult to know when the conversations are real and when they take place in the old man's mind. Both men make assertions, deny them, and later reaffirm them. Each is uncertain of when the other is telling the truth, and since the novel is exclusively dialogue, the reader has no basis for certainty either. A number of patterns and themes are developed inviting synthesis and promising to satisfy our desire for meaning, but ultimately these remain ambiguous. One reviewer perceptively describes the novel as "a disheartening, brilliant book in which the reader participates by foolishly rushing in to fill the blanks the author perversely leaves." In one sense, the curse of the title falls upon the reader who struggles to attain a clear, coherent interpretation.

Some puzzling contemporary novels leave us with the strong suspicion that their riddles are ultimately indecipherable or, if decipherable, not worth the effort. Such a judgment of this novel would be unfair because it does display insights (criticism of Freudianism and Marxism, for example) which inspire confidence that contemplating its ambiguities will not be effort wasted.

Vargas Llosa is probably right about the forces inclining Latin American writers toward social and political commitment, but these three books demonstrate that some of those writers are willing to eschew such commitment in order to focus upon language, style, narrative technique, intimation rather than statement, and on vivid expression devoid of overt meaning. □

Pedology & Pedagogy

Neil Postman: *The Disappearance of Childhood;* Delacorte Press; New York.

Mortimer J. Adler: *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto;* Macmillan, New York.

by Allan C. Carlson

Our children are being snatched away just as surely as if they were being physically kidnapped. The villains are obscure, but the results are clear. Twelve-year-old models draped in sexually enticing clothes and posed in erotic contortions stare with limpid eyes out of the advertisements in leading magazines. A seven-year-old serves as guest host of the raucous *Saturday Night Live.* Swedish sex educators, panicked by surging levels of teenage pregnancy, propose issuing contraceptives to seven- and eight-year-olds. Disney's movie version of the child is generally displaced by the adultlike creatures found in *The Exorcist, Pretty Baby, Paper Moon, The Omen,* and *The Blue Lagoon.* The rate of serious crime among American youth under the age of 15 has risen 11,000 percent since 1950. "Nonserious" child crime (burglary, larceny, and auto theft) is up 8,300 percent. A New York town recently indicted four "boys," ages 9 to 13, for the rape of a seven-year-old girl. Children on current television sitcoms are portrayed as worldly little adults. Sexual innuendo on the lips of a tightly sweatered, prematurely curvaceous eleven-year-old is a surefire laugh; what was once considered psychopathic has become normal. Children's-rights advocates press for the elimination of "legal discrimination" against children. The pederasts are not far behind, working through several national organizations for the "right" of child-love.

Educator Neil Postman, in his disturbing book *The Disappearance of Childhood,* looks to the past to explain this massive cultural shift. Borrowing arguments from Philippe Ariès, Lloyd de Mause, and other historians of the family, Postman argues that childhood—understood as a distinct stage of life spanning the years 7 to 17—is a cultural creation, moreover, a relatively recent one. The Greeks, he notes, had no concept of a child. While the Romans did evidence some appreciation of childhood as a stage of life needing special protection (infanticide, for example, was finally outlawed throughout the Empire in 374 A.D.), that perception disappeared during the millennium which followed Rome's collapse. In that era, everyone over the age

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of six mixed freely and equally. The schools that existed in the Middle Ages enrolled 40-year-olds and 10-year-olds alike. Young people had access to all forms of cultural behavior. Playing with the privy parts of children and exposing young people to bawdy language were "normal" practices. Emotional commitment to one's natural children was correspondingly low; infant and child mortality was appallingly high.

The concept of a "child," Postman explains, reemerged during the intellectual turmoil of the Renaissance and Reformation. The adult-child distinction, he notes, rests on the concept of a "secret" adult knowledge, wherein human sexuality and aspects of the "dark side" of human existence, such as death or illness, are hidden from small children. A well-developed sense of shame, Postman emphasizes, is fundamental to this idea of childhood. In the generally nonliterate, "oralistic" medieval world, such secrets could not be kept. Once the young had command of speech, they were accepted as full participants in the social order. Reflecting this orientation, medieval portraits tend to portray children as miniature adults. However, Postman maintains, the invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century made childhood again possible. For the printing technology rapidly created a fresh symbolic world that radically reshaped human consciousness to parallel this new structure of communication. The distinction between those who could read and those who could not became Western culture's great divide. "Literate Man" stood apart from the child. Henceforth, "the young would have to *become* adults, and they would have to do it by learning to read, by entering the world of typography."

The paraphernalia of childhood began to blossom in the 16th century, with a strong linkage to the aspirations and successful rise of the modern middle class. Erasmus's *Colloquies* became the first modern tract stressing the concept of "shame." Portraits began to focus on home interiors, family ties, and the tenderness of children. Schools emerged that were designed for children alone, and the latter became subject to a rigorous discipline. The books they read were censored for their contents; only slowly were the young to be made aware of adult secrets. Special children's clothing and a distinct child's literature emerged during the mid-18th century. Laws were recast to treat children as qualitatively different from adults, enjoying a preferred, protected status. Modern thinkers, from Locke and Rousseau to Freud and Dewey, crystallized this paradigm of the child as one whose individuality must be preserved by nurturing, whose capacity for self-control, deferred gratification, and logical thought must be extended, and whose knowledge of life must be carefully controlled.

The progress of this image in the West was uneven. Seven-year-olds were still hung in 1780 England for petty theft. As late as 1890, American high schools enrolled only seven percent of the 14- to 17-year-old population. Yet between 1850 and 1950, Postman shows, the Western concept of childhood reached its zenith. Children were taken out of the factories and placed in schools. They were given their own clothing, games, furniture, style of life, and social world. Above all, they were protected from adult emotions, adult lust, and adult violence.

What then went wrong? Postman, echoing Marshall McLuhan, turns again to communications technology as the prime engine of change. The telegraph, he argues, planted the seeds of our current discontents, for it broke the historic connection between transportation and human communication and eventually made information uncontrollable. The early 20th century also witnessed what Postman calls "the graphic revolution," the emergence of a new symbolic world of pictures, cartoons, posters, and advertisements which introduced a strong element of the irrational into politics and commerce.

These two revolutions—the electronic and the graphic—culminated and merged in the television of the 1950's, and the world of literacy, adult secrets, and childhood began to collapse. There are no skills in watching television, Postman notes; it makes no demands on the mind or behavior nor does it *intrinsically* segregate its audience. Anyone over the age of two can absorb its images more or less as an equal. Indeed, nearly three million children, ages 2-11, watch television every night of the year between the hours of 11 and 12 P.M. Television cannot whisper. Its pictures are concrete and self-explanatory. And as children learn the old adult secrets, "shame"—that emotion that gave authority to adulthood—becomes meaningless. Manners decline. Children see no reason to defer to adults, who in most emotional and intellectual respects are their equals. Adults no longer see reasons to hide words or actions from youthful ears and eyes. The once-cultivated curiosity of children is replaced by cynicism, then arrogance. Without hidden knowledge and a complex symbolic logic to reveal, schools and educators lose their own sense of purpose.

Moreover, even the grown-up disappears. In place of "the adult" understood to be a reasoned, self-restrained, thinking, and historically aware individual, we have in growing numbers the "adult-child." Postman defines this old/new type "as a grown-up whose intellectual and emotional capacities are unrealized and, in particular, not significantly different from those associated with children." The "adult-child" does not nurture children, has no politics, practices no religion, represents no traditions, has no extended conversations, holds no serious plans. His prototypes are the characters found in the standard television sitcoms or the human subjects portrayed on such video spectacles as *Real People* and *That's Incredible.*

"But what does all this matter?" the libertarian might ask. As Postman acknowledges, childhood is but a recent creation. Life has endured and will con-

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tinue without that particular concept.

Probably so. Yet there is a price that will be paid. Reputable authorities agree, for example, that the real incidence of child abuse is indeed rising in the United States. There were 711,142 reported cases in 1979 alone. Postman suggests, correctly I think, that part of the reason for this increase is that children are now commonly perceived as they were in the 14th century—an era also characterized by its reign of terror against the young—as merely "miniature adults" deserving no special protection. In 1982, moreover, 1.2 million U.S. teenagers became pregnant, a vast increase over the figure from the 1950's. Four hundred thousand of these children turned to abortion; most of the others became children raising children. The rate of venereal disease among 10- to 14-year-olds tripled between 1956 and 1979 and has doubled again since the latter year. Our culture's little adults are rapidly catching up with their elders. The social consequences are staggering.

So what's to be done? Here, Postman trips over his McLuhanesque determinism. The nature of the television medium, he repeats incessantly, allows for no other result. "[T]elevision *must* make use of every existing taboo in the culture," he states at one point. "[I]t is the character of the medium, not the character of the medium's users, that produces the adult-child," he explains elsewhere. "Although this [destruction of a 200-year-old image of the young as child] is exactly what . . . our modern filmmakers . . . and TV writers are doing, no moral or social demerits may be charged against them," he concludes.

Such a view allows too many real villains to escape. We are no more captives of our media form than we are captives of our economics, our psychological drives, or our evolution. All such "determinisms" oversimplify history and reduce human beings to mere pawns. To take obvious examples, television executives *chose* to drop shows like *Leave It To Beaver,* to add those such as *Three's Company,* or to broadcast an afternoon "children's special" on 13-year-old sex. Parents are free, within limits, to deny television to their offspring, or to restrict access to the box. Moreover, blatant ideologues, usually calling themselves social scientists, have been openly attacking family life and children for nearly two decades. Consider a 1971 article by "family counselor" Robert Harper which called for a "blockbuster intensive therapeutic" Federal program to help children and youth "overcome the contamination and crippling of their sexual beings by our culture." Harper urged parents to "encourage, help, and foster" sexual play among their preadolescent children. "To prevent sexual hang-ups in interactional as well as masturbatory sex," he concluded, "we have to start when children are barely toddlers."

Even nonsensical ideas, it appears, have consequences and theories such as Harper's gave credence to assaults on the mores protecting children. Television's authentic and extraordinary challenge to the concept of childhood notwithstanding, there is still room for human choice and still the opportunity to hold accountable those who have failed in their responsibilities or who have intentionally subverted the social order.

Postman also stumbles over the few liberal coals still warming his weary frame. He acknowledges that "the liberal tradition . . . has had pitifully little to offer" in response to the destruction of childhood. He goes so far as to suggest, albeit incorrectly, "that the only sizable group in the body politic that has so far grasped the point is that benighted movement known as the Moral Majority." Nonetheless, Postman still wants to believe that "the transformation of shameful behavior" such as incest and homosexuality into "social problems" or "alternate life styles" may sometimes "represent a step toward a more human sensitivity." The old faith dies hard.

In the end, Postman suggests little more than to view parenting as "an act of rebellion," with rebel parents insisting that their children learn the disciplines of delayed gratification, sexual modesty, and manners and that their children's access to the media be limited. Such acts, he concludes, would contribute to "what might be called the Monastery Effect," keeping alive "a humane tradition" in an increasingly disoriented and hostile culture.

Alongside Postman's analysis, Mortimer J. Adler's *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* strikes one as boldly reactionary and virtually irrelevant. Written on behalf of a group of distinguished educators, the *Proposal* makes sweeping promises to parents (to reverse the decline in the quality of education), to teachers (to restore classroom order), to school boards (to reverse the flight of the middle class to private and church schools), and so on down a lengthy list of interested constituents. It seems safe to conclude that the promises will not be met. In a nutshell, the *Proposal* calls for the creation of an equal, high-quality educational program for all public-school students, grades 1 to 12. Vocational education and tracking systems would be scrapped, to be replaced by a general course of study involving such traditional practices as drilling in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, a mandatory second language, Socratic dialogues over great ideas, disciplined conversations about values, civic education, and a sort of "great books" curriculum.

On the surface it sounds good, and many conservatives have leaped with enthusiasm onto the *Paideia* bandwagon. And indeed, if the nation's whole educational structure was somehow quickly reorganized in line with this vision, it would probably be marginally better. Yet the *Proposal* all but ignores a whole range of developments buffeting the educational enterprise: militant teachers' unions; top-heavy school administrations; the corrosive value vacuum inherent in educational theories predicated on secular liberalism; a contracting tax base; the demographic decline of the nation as the birthrate remains low; the infestation of the schools by drugs and

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violence; the influx of the "new immigrants"; not to mention the impact of the electronic media on minds, young and old. Any serious educational reform effort must address these questions in concrete ways. Moreover, while the *Proposal* prescribes the form which proper education should follow, it leaves the actual content of education—both substantive and moral—distressingly vague. Finally, in its zeal for "equality" and "democracy," the *Proposal* hints at potentially dangerous acts, including new rounds of government intervention "to remedy the cultural inequality of homes and environments."

Adler and friends claim to represent the spirits of Horace Mann, John Dewey, and Robert Hutchins in their effort to extend humanistic knowledge to all human beings. Yet, as Postman has suggested, this latter group of men at least worked within a cultural matrix that had a clear vision of what children were and how educators should meet the young's special needs. *The Paideia Proposal* attempts to rebuild the educational enterprise on a rapidly crumbling cultural foundation. Such effort is an act of folly, however well-meaning. □

The Varieties of Religio-Critical Experience

Jacques Barzun: *Critical Questions: On Music and Letters, Culture and Biography, 1940-1980;* University of Chicago Press; Chicago.

Diane Johnson: *Terrorists & Novelists;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

by Bryce Christensen

Idolatry, it appears, has critical consequences. Idolizing William James, Jacques Barzun writes criticism reminiscent of the great philosopher's lucid investigations of profound questions. Apotheosizing George Sand, Diane Johnson writes reviews suggesting the talented French novelist's inability to decide in whose bed she wished to stay.

This is not, of course, to say that Barzun's *Critical Questions* is devoted to exposition of James's pragmatism (though some of that is included) nor that Johnson's *Terrorists & Novelists* is merely an apologia for the Baronne Dudevant's life of free love (though it includes one), but simply that in their choice of demigods both writers clearly reveal the basis for their respective critical judgments. As Barzun observes: "The choice of our idols, if it is conscious and free, defines something in us—a kinship or an opposition; we may seek something we lack or something close to what we possess." For Barzun and Johnson, admiration of James and Sand, respectively, appears to signal kinship, not opposition. Clearly, the reason that Barzun singles James out as "the philosopher . . . I trust and admire above all others" is that he shares many of the qualities he attributes to the Harvard psychologist: "great artistic gifts and rich sensibility," "artistry in words," "independent judgments in literature," and antipathy for "mere abstraction." Barzun's own rich "artistic sensibility" and his masterful "artistry in words" are especially evident in this collection of relatively short pieces, over half of which are devoted to "The Musical Life" in general and to his favorite musician, French composer and conductor Hector Berlioz, in particular. Unlike much music criticism, however, Barzun's does not concern itself exclusively with music per se, nor is it framed in technical terms accessible only to trained musicians. Because he hates to see music made "a thing apart, jealously or scornfully cut off from the total sphere of pleasure and significance," Barzun insists on discussing music within a context defined by the other arts and by the life outside the recital hall. An insight concerning baroque music becomes a comment about Renaissance drama becomes a discovery concerning contemporary social attitudes becomes an observation about life itself—without ever becoming superficial or superfluous. A discussion of the meaning of "The Moonlight Sonata," for example, takes the reader to the library, the theater, the museum, the army camp, the chapel, and the dance floor; discourses about Beethoven and Bach somehow become investigations of the nature of artistic criticism and the relationship between the professional and the general public; questions concerning the "ineffable" character of music find their answers in Shakespeare and semiotics. In examining the "eternal triangle" of "life, art, discourse," Barzun never dallies long in any one corner. And like William James, who profitably ventured into painting, philosophy, physiology, psychology, and pedagogy, Barzun ranges widely, little regarding the artificially contrived boundaries modern professionals often set between their work and that of the rest of mankind. In this he somewhat resembles Berlioz, whom he applauds for "embracing and fusing all genres and materials."

As too many modern commentators do not, Barzun perceives the frigid sterility of art and criticism "divorced from the actualities of human life" and the purblind haughtiness of modern academics who ignore the work of specialists in other fields and who unilaterally excommunicate *"the great public."* With unanswerable rigor (lightened by the play of a trenchant wit), he exposes the posturing of the aesthetes who reduce music—or literature—to meaningless "pure form." With delightfully irreverent humor, he punctures the pomposities of self-serious and tunnel-visioned professionals and champions the free spirit of "the indispensable amateur" who can "cherish the

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unity of culture." Of his learned colleagues in the arts, he therefore demands that "talk and thought about art . . . conform to the canons of common sense" and that criticism be "written for the layman; an educated layman if possible, but a layman and not a professor." And in his own work, Barzun convincingly demonstrates that such criticism *is* possible and that clarity precludes neither subtlety nor depth.

The persistent breadth of Barzun's interest makes his essays on "Culture and History" seem a very natural outgrowth of the sections focusing on music. In these pieces on literature, biography, aesthetics, and cultural history, Barzun evinces the same independence of judgment he admires in James. Again and again he demonstrates a Jamesian power to resist the modish mendacities and stupidities of our day. For Barzun, "the reason or excuse for making any criticism public . . . is to counteract conventional opinion, generally false," and it is to this lonely task that he dedicates himself. With relatively few others, he affirms, contra the New Criticism and its critical offspring, that subject matter and critical intent *do* matter in literary study and that the modern obsession with literary form *qua* form, with the subconscious, with "il-literalism," and with irony are deceptive and destructive. ("Like the cry of Fire," he quips, "the cry of Irony is always believed, in the interest of one's own safety: one does not want to get caught.") Similarly iconoclastic, in modern terms, is his disparaging of the pseudoiconoclasm of modern drama typified in a play depicting "some young louts torturing a baby in a perambulator." True, Barzun is—like James—sufficiently pliant to the currents of modern skepticism to exclude from his criticism any orthodox conception of the transcendent as an objective reality and therefore to accept resignedly the waning of traditional religion as a creative force. But, with James, he is still able to stand against the modern tide of secularism in his sincere appreciation of the sacred as a vital dimension of *human* experience. "Art and religion were related," he observes, "in the best periods."

With James, Barzun is skeptical about all doctrines not firmly grounded in experience and is consequently forever hammering on "the mind-hardened eardrums" of ideologues with facts that vitiate their theories. Liberals he informs that their dogmatic rejection of restraint and hierarchy is entrapping modern man within "a jungle of laws and hindrances"; aesthetes he notifies that, as a subtitute for religion, art is now "causing the anguish of pointlessness—the horror of the absurd." While others are busy multiplying applications of Freud's theories to biographical study, Barzun is pointing out that Freud's own application of his theories led him into fatuity and circularity in his study of da Vinci. Without a predefined theoretical construct to hide behind, Barzun must follow the example of his idol, William James, in relying upon his own powers of observation and analysis. "All my life," Barzun writes, "I have taken the liberty . . . to try to think straight about the subjects that have interested me." Not surprisingly, he finds that "fashionable cant" which endorses the wrong answers and the "laissez faire" tolerance which "would preclude the finality of any critical findings" are both impediments to the kind of consistent straight-thinking he wishes to practice. Strictly, perhaps, Barzun's thought is not "straight," since, as Bea Friedland observes in the introduction, "some Barzunian dialectic" fuses "presumed antitheses like elitism and popularization." But the swings of Barzun's dialectic are always under control, inevitably bringing the reader to rest at a predetermined conclusion: "The critic," he explains, "begins in some familiar key and modulates to his own pre-arranged full close." One may legitimately disagree with Barzun at some points (as, for instance, when he argues that even the savage art wrought by "soured, destructive, nihilistic" creators will ultimately prove beneficial by feeding our spirit "sensation till it recreates idea, emotion, and belief"), but no one need ever wonder how he

LIBERAL CULTURE

Faith as Light or Darkness

In *Commonweal,* a magazine for Catholics with consciences honed by Marxism, we read recently an explication of the liberation theology. The *Commonweal* exegete wrote:

> This faith commitment leads to greater awareness and analysis of socio-economic structures which perpetuate poverty, to active involvement in changing these structures, and to a new understanding of the faith in the light of this involvement.

As fellow believers in spirituality, we value hope. We thus hope that the thinkers of liberation theology will therefore piously analyze Adam Smith,

Bastiat, Von Mises, Hayek, and Friedman to acquire an awareness of why capitalism has made America, Japan, and Western Europe the wealthiest regions on earth, and try to understand why communism has severely retarded the economies of Russia, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and Cuba. □

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reached those points or why he advances them.

Unfortunately, such consistency and clarity are both among the burnt offerings that Diane Johnson has offered up to the wandering goddess George Sand, whose capricious infidelity seems about the only principle governing the reviews collected in *Terrorists & Novelists*. In her piece on Sand's autobiography, Johnson prostrates herself before the faithless author of *Elle et Lui* apparently for three reasons: because, supremely, Sand's genitals were of the right kind, because her commitment to "self-fulfillment" and career obliterated all obligations to others—especially men—and because Sand "considered herself a free and responsible moral agent, accountable and capable of theorizing." The way in which Sand's "free and responsible" moral theorizing operated is best seen in her life of wildly erratic sexual liaisons. The moral theorizing of her devotee, Ms. Johnson, is less salacious but just as restless and incontinent. Ms. Johnson seems determined to get in bed with as many *ideas* as possible, without entering into a vow of fidelity with any of them. The result, predictably, is a series of abortions. Thus we find Ms. Johnson defending Sand's sexual behavior by arguing that Sand was "too sincere to be chaste" but indignantly denouncing rapists for their lack of restraint. (Who ever accused a rapist of insincerity?) Or we find her complaining that everything women novelists write "gets read in the light of womanhood whether or not womanhood has anything to do with what they are writing about," yet herself interpreting "Little Red Riding Hood" as a cautionary tale used by men to keep women in line. ("Obey me by not going into the woods or you *will* get raped.") Chameleonlike, Ms. Johnson indicts C.D.B. Bryan for unexpectedly concluding a book which alleges moral wrongdoing by army officers with an endorsement of American military officers as "fine men," but can herself conclude a review of *Executioner's Song* (which shows, albeit tentatively, that Mailer is a despicable vampire) with a Milquetoast complaint that in such "a powerful and absorbing story, one can only wish to know how it really was." Looking at the Jonestown tragedy, she can shrilly demand that the Federal government forcibly intervene in families in which the parents join "cults" (reserving for the bureaucrats the right to define "cult"); yet when reading Bainbridge's *Young Adolf*, she can shudder at "the real horror" of a government which permits "authorities to come in the night to take some children from poor people living in squalor." Most inexplicable of all is Ms. Johnson's praise for Doris Lessing's resistance to "moral determinism," while she herself speaks of Gary Gilmore as a "poor convict" and a "somehow doomed man" and of Jim Jones as a "demented" leader who was therefore not fully responsible for his actions. What does Ms. Johnson's book finally add up to? She says it best herself when writing about Bainbridge's *Young Adolf*: "No moment of realization contradicts the sheer muddle."

"The intelligence at work in [*Terrorists & Novelists*] . . . is uncommonly flexible."
—***New York Times Book Review***

About the only way to make any sense whatever out of the mess Johnson and Sand have created is to invite Barzun and James in to do some straightening. (Rad-feminists were never much for keeping house.) Confronted by Johnson's hodgepodge of self-contradictory modernist preoccupations, Barzun would likely reiterate that "the perpetual reminder of diversity and change scatters the wits and diminishes the power to attend, decide, and conclude." When Johnson confesses in her preface that her reviews reveal "a preoccupation with violent events," the reader need only turn to Barzun to learn that when "moralized by the Liberal dogma," the modern consciousness "resorts to one or another form of violence as the common medium of expression." When Johnson suspends judgment on Didion's fiction of "surfaces" without interior because of ambivalence concerning the "unresolved question" of meaning vs. "pure form" in literature, Barzun glosses: "A writer who always knows what he means will assume other writers carry meaning too." When Johnson can note the thoroughly modish character of Doctorow's fiction and yet unironically style him a "prophet," then Barzun will elucidate: "We dare not call things by their right names, not so much because we are kindly as because we want to obtain kindness for ourselves." Indeed, because all of the work Johnson has collected originally appeared in the *New York Review of Books* and *New York Times Book Review*, one suspects that Ms. Johnson's unwarranted tenderness in handling the likes of Doctorow, Mailer, and Didion derives not so much from her devotion to George Sand as from her regard for another feminine deity named years ago by William James: "the bitch goddess success." □

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Of Monsignors & Monkeys

Graham Greene: *Monsignor Quixote;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

Bernard Malamud: *God's Grace;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Robert C. Steensma

Graham Greene and Bernard Malamud are two writers whose novels are rarely received apathetically by either reviewers or general readers. Unlike many of their contemporaries who infest the best-seller lists, both are masters of the delicate art of reaching, touching, and holding the hearts and minds of their readers. Greene's *Monsignor Quixote* (his twenty-second novel) and Malamud's *God's Grace* (his ninth) are not exceptions, for both men are fascinated with a theme highly unpopular in trendy circles these days: the relationship between God and man in a modern world which has sold its spiritual and intellectual birthrights for a mess of pottage. Consequently neither novel has made the best-seller lists, and neither will do much to soften the indignities that both authors have suffered at the hands of the Nobel Prize committee for literature. Since neither Greene nor Malamud is addicted to anti-American posturizing or to catering to Third World chic, it is understandable that the committee would award the 1982 prize to Gabriel Garcia Márquez, a Colombian whose talent is distinctly inferior to that of Greene or Malamud.

Both novels deal with men—an aging Spanish priest and a young American scientist—who try to find their way in worlds which have crumbled—figuratively in Greene's story, literally in Malamud's—as the foundations have been eaten away by the termites of modern secularism or blasted to bits by nuclear weaponry. These men often despair of their worlds and see themselves as what the priest's companion describes as "fictions . . . in the mind of God."

Greene's story is that of Father Quixote, a descendant of Cervantes's famous innocent, who tends his spiritual flock in a small Spanish town. Harassed by his bureaucratic bishop, he stumbles through his pastoral duties, is elevated to the rank of Monsignor when he humbly befriends a traveling Vatican official, and sets out on a brief vacation trip with his faithful friend, a communist ex-mayor affectionately nicknamed Sancho. As they rattle across the countryside in Rocinante, the priest's wheezing old car, they are involved in a number of seriocomic episodes before Monsignor Quixote returns to El Toboso, badly bruised in heart and mind by his encounters with the church hierarchy and the police, to celebrate a hallucinatory last mass and to die in the arms of his faithful Sancho.

Malamud's plot, too, is modern in its setting and its implications. Calvin Cohn, an American paleologist and son of a rabbi, is the only human survivor of a nuclear war between Djanks and the Drushkies; he is living on a tropical island with a young chimp named Buz who has been trained to speak English. Like Robinson Crusoe, Cohn tries to recreate his civilization, but he must do so with a group of simians with biblical names like Esau and Mary Madelyn. In this overly long parable, as in so much of his work, Malamud's symbolism is both impressive and at times heavy-handed. Those unfamiliar with scriptural echoes of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, and Christ and Mary Magdalene are faced with some heavy reading.

One fact is clear: both Greene and Malamud are probing the dilemma of modern man in a world that he did not create and does not understand, a world in which God is either playing hide-and-seek with His creation or has chosen to live and rule elsewhere. The Monsignor, Sancho, and Cohn are men who have found that the modern world is a spiritual desert and that the only hope for survival is to be found in the Church (for the Monsignor), the Communist Party (for Sancho), or whatever world one can rebuild from the rubble (for Cohn).

Monsignor Quixote, despite the daily disappointments he receives from his condescending bishop, his shrewish housekeeper, his well-meaning Sancho, and his poor, sinful parish, tries to persevere in his Christian vision, which is viewed by others as "deeds of chivalry in a world that didn't believe in those old stories." He tries to find spiritual comradeship in Sancho, but the two spend most of their time vigorously debating their different beliefs: Christianity versus Marxism, spirituality versus materialism, Christ versus Brezhnev. Sancho claims that communism has survived despite Stalin and the Politburo; Quixote asserts that Christianity has endured in spite of Judas and the Catholic Curia. The politician Sancho longs for a world in which all material needs are satisfied by the state; Quixote's eyes are on the next world, but he never forgets the present one. A curious pair, an odd couple, but Quixote and Sancho symbolize the enduring human dilemma. Quixote is an innocent, but so is Sancho, and they are not as far apart as they might seem. Each has his scriptures, his saints, his doubts; each is deeply disturbed by injustice. Stopping to eat under a rock which has been painted with a red hammer and sickle, the Monsignor says that he would rather eat under the sign of the cross, but Sancho replies, "What does it matter? The taste of the cheese will not be affected by cross or hammer. Besides is there much difference between the two? They are both protests against injustice."

Father Quixote falls into several comic mistakes as a result of his Christian innocence. He mistakes a condom for a balloon, spends a restful night in a brothel he believes to be a hotel over-

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staffed with friendly young ladies, and uncomprehendingly watches a porno movie to which he has been drawn by its seemingly pious title, *A Maiden's Prayer*. As his ancestor fought the windmills, Monsignor Quixote attacks a festival in which visiting Mexicans cover a statue of the Virgin Mary with paper money. Confronting these blasphemers, he roars, "How dare you clothe her like that in money? It would be better to carry her through the streets naked." But in his outburst he finds an answer to the prayer he made after viewing the porno movie: "O God, make me human, let me feel temptation. Save me from my indifference."

But it is the uncertainty of this world and the next that gives a focus to Quixote's life. In a dream he sees Christ saved from the agony of the cross by a legion of angels; thus "there was no final agony, no heavy stone which had to be rolled away, no discovery of an empty tomb." He awakens to realize that such a miracle would destroy Christianity, a religion in which doubt has to be the beginning of faith: "There was now no ambiguity, no room for doubt and no room for faith at all." In spite of our best humane and religious impulses, "We all make cruel parodies of what we intend."

Monsignor Quixote is a book which has much to say about faith and doubt, religion and politics, God and Marx. The modern world, for Greene, is devoid of belief and values and offers only death and insanity to the unbeliever. Sancho and Quixote, though poles apart in their theology and politics, can still find some degree of happiness in sharing those simple things that symbolize the goodness and wholeness of life—wine, cheese, bread, a journey.

Malamud's book, on the other hand, is a snarl of unresolved complexities and ambiguities. At the beginning, in a confrontation with God, Cohn hears the reasons for the catastrophe: "They have destroyed my handiwork, the conditions of their survival: the sweet air I gave them to breathe; the fresh water I

Editorial Note

I must disagree with Professor Steensma concerning his evaluation of Graham Greene as a master "of the delicate art of reaching, touching, and holding the hearts and minds of . . . readers." He once was that kind of author, but after the last 20 years of his bizarre ideological juggling and a constantly deteriorating stylistic mannerism, he hardly qualifies any longer for these literary superlatives. If Greene is not addicted "to anti-American posturing," or "Third World chic" (of which he was one of the spiritual fathers), I don't know who is, or who does it better; in this respect, certainly no modern writer can do it with a more "delicate" touch, never losing the American best-seller list and book market from his, or her, sight.

Monsignor Quixote's central message is the parity (philosophical, historical, moral) of Catholicism and communism. "[I]s there much difference between the two?" asks Greene's communist protagonist, and Greene seems to proclaim gleefully that there is none. To anyone who lives with open eyes and a functioning mind at the end of the 20th century, this is a bold-faced lie, wicked demagoguery. Torquemada, his villainy notwithstanding, knew nothing about Stalin but Stalin knew all about Torquemada; the difference between the Inquisition and the gulag is both quantitative and qualitative, as Greene should well know. He chooses a pose of coy ignorance which his admirers call artistry. I call it intellectual and moral convenience—a despicable stance which Greene has successfully *pretended* to combat throughout his entire career. *Monsignor Quixote* is a charmless and dull novel. It's also witless —in spite of a continuous effort to be witty—and boring, regardless of all his exertions to appear winsome. Greene wanted to take on the most time-honored glory of the Catholic body of writing: the lighthearted dialogue between the faithful (if not the most intellectually sharp) of God and his perennial philosophical detractor—the rationalist, materialist agnostic. But discussing eschatology and ethics with a light, engaging touch—as did Swift and Sterne, Voltaire and Diderot, Daudet and France, and finally, in our time, Giovanni Guareschi in his *Il Piccolo Mondo di Don Camillo*—proved to be beyond his reach. Guareschi's Don Camillo is a simpleton illuminated by God's merciful brilliance; Greene's Quixote is merely a simpleton, one that is singularly unattractive in his verbal and intellectual communication. It is obvious that the Romance literatures are characterized by one inimitable trait —their writers seem to possess a sense of ironic humility toward and mock obedience to the fundamental truths which so easily turn into a sort of graceful dogmatism, and which finally project humanness at its best. The Northern, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon tradition of literature appears somewhat deficient when compared to the French, Spanish, or Italian know-how in this respect, and Greene's last novel is an abysmal reminder of this rule. Guareschi's Don Camillo, the country priest, never overwhelms his friend and opponent, a small-town communist mayor; nor does he ever fully persuade the reader. He wins his arguments on the strength of submitting his all-too-human weakness of mind and heart to a higher authority which he trusts—not blindly, but because he is convinced of its supreme sagacity. Guareschi does not fear his adversary puncturing his religious ossification of thought: in direct confrontation, Don Camillo's religiousness and Catholicism's own humanism, all occasional obscurantism notwithstanding, comes out as victorious, warm wisdom—exactly what Greene is unable to project. His effort, in fact, is so inept as to make one wonder whether he really believes in the superiority of spirituality over Marxian dialectics, a quandary which, of course, excludes him from the delights of celebrating small but meaningful victories. And as for his gift for literary sensitivities—once so exquisite in *The Power and the Glory* and *The End of the Affair*—it has failed him miserably this time. Thus, from *Monsignor Quixote* Graham Greene emerges as a writer of shallow insights, banal tone, stilted argumentation, stuffed ear, and wooden tactility of style.

—L.T.

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blessed them with, to drink and bathe in; the fertile green earth. They tore apart my ozone, carbonized my oxygen, acidified my refreshing rain. Now they affront my cosmos. How much shall the Lord endure?" Man has not only destroyed nature and civilization, but also his own moral fiber. God tells Cohn, "I made man to be free, but his freedom, badly used, destroyed him. In sum, the evil overwhelmed the good. The Second Flood, this that now subsides on the broken earth, they brought on themselves. They had not lived according to the Covenant. . . . Therefore I let them do away with themselves. They invented the manner; I turned my head. That you went on living, Mr. Cohn, I regret to say, was no more than a marginal error. Such things may happen."

> "One is, I think, supposed to feel a horror and a pity; but God's grace is mainly ennui, so what's the point?"
>
> —*Village Voice*

Cohn doggedly tries to reconstruct his old civilization but at every step, like an Old Testament patriarch, he finds his hopes frustrated by the same old human cussedness that angered Moses and Isaiah. The apes in his small world lie, quarrel, sulk, intimidate, cower, mutilate, rape, kill, and cannibalize. Cohn himself degenerates to the point where he impregnates the lisping chimp, Mary Madelyn, in a scene of such bad taste that it could have been written by Erica Jong. Cohn is driven by the hope that the religious teachings of the Judaic tradition might develop a humane civilization among these brutes, that "if this small community behaved, developed, endured, it might someday—if some chimpy Father Abraham got himself born—produce its own Covenant with God." But the island becomes only another failed utopia in which the idealistic vision of the founder is smashed by reality as Cohn feels Buz's razor at his throat.

Malamud's allegory weaves in and out of the narrative in such a way as to frustrate the reader. Who is Cohn? A second God trying to create a new world or just attempting to correct the mistakes He made in the first? Who is Buz? God the Father, Abraham? What precisely is the significance of Esau and Mary Madelyn? What is symbolized in the death of Cohn, bound and kneeling, at the hands of Buz? Any attempt at exegesis in this novel creates more problems than it solves. Malamud's olio of rabbinic lore, farce, parable, theology, and word games just doesn't work. His short stories and novels are marked by their evocation of human concerns, but such is not the case with *God's Grace*.

Monsignor Quixote and *God's Grace*, whatever their merits or weaknesses, are reminders that there are still writers who are willing to do more than pander to popular taste, who believe that commitment to beliefs and values is necessary for the survival of mankind. Although they die as a result of their battles against the world and the flesh, Quixote and Cohn also win victories of a sort in being true in their quests to solve what the professor at the end of Greene's book calls the "infinite mystery." Neither the priest nor the scientist solve the mystery, but at least each shows that a quiet and humble heroism is still possible in a world the Monsignor calls "a desert without end." By their struggles, Monsignor Quixote and Cal Cohn prove that human beings are more than "fictions . . . in the mind of God." □

Fighting the Better Fight

Franky Schaeffer: *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality;* Crossway Books; Westchester, Illinois.

***The Wealth of Families: Ethics and Economics in the 1980's;* Edited by Carl A. Anderson and William J. Gribbin; The American Family Institute; Washington, D.C.**

by Leo Browning

Anger seems a peculiarly unchristian emotion. After all, Jesus taught his disciples to turn the other cheek when struck and chided His apostles for their vengeful desire to call fire down from heaven upon inhospitable Samaritan villages who turned away their Master. However, the use to which the Galilean put His scourge made of cords strongly implies that when the issue is something larger than personal affront, anger may well be the appropriate Christian response. It is precisely such righteous wrath that Franky Schaeffer wishes to encourage with *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality*. And though he wishes particularly to foster ire among evangelical Christians like himself, Schaeffer persuasively contends that all Americans now live in "times in which anyone with a shred of moral principle should be profoundly angry." Indeed, despite Schaeffer's extensive use of conservative Protestant theologians and writers such as his father, Francis Schaeffer, and his frequent quotation of Scripture, he casts his net widely enough to give his argument cogency with Christians of different orientation and even—though surely to a lesser degree—with moral secularists. When the voices of Mother Teresa, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, C.S. Lewis, Sir William Blackstone, George Will, and Leopold Tyrmand join in a single message and when key elements of that message are echoed by decidedly more liberal commentators such as Hodding Carter, Harvey Cox,

Mr. Browning expresses his religious faith and filial commitment as a church organist and father in the Midwest.

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and Teddy White, then few with even the faintest pretensions of objectivity or open-mindedness can turn their hearing aids down low enough not to hear *something*.

The two objects of the indignation expressed in this book are "the liberal, humanistic elements of American society who do not play by the rules they espouse" and the docile professing Christians who have passively accepted relegation to "a cultural backwater, where we are meant to paddle around content in the knowledge that we are merely allowed to exist." In indicting the prevailing liberalism for inducing "the bankruptcy of the human spirit" which vitiates so much of contemporary life, Schaeffer occasionally overstates his case (as when he claims that "worldwide abortion takes more lives annually than some of the 'worst case' scenarios of nuclear war"), lapses into a histrionic overuse of italics, rhetorical questions, and exclamatory punctuation (including "?!?"), and in a few places employs questionable organization or logic (as when he argues that a thoroughgoing belief in a blindly mechanistic universe would not permit scientists to "trust the results of their much touted experiments"). However, one can forgive such faults seventy times seven in a book which so dauntlessly assails the "self-righteous inhumanity" of the elite dictators who govern the media and popular culture. Especially telling is Schaeffer's exposé of the "antireligious bigotry of total secularism" which poses as the value-neutral promotion of pluralistic debate. Even when spokesmen for Judeo-Christian views are well-educated, articulate, and deferential, they are denied the sympathetic attention routinely granted to the most boorish representatives of black, Indian, women's, or even homosexual "rights." Among the numerous documented instances Schaeffer offers to substantiate his point is the account of a highly professional New York seminar on the growing evils of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia; it was attended by 1,000 people from diverse religious and educational communities but totally ignored by the media—except as a backdrop for the 12 "prochoice" demonstrators who showed up and left at precisely the same time as the television cameras and newspaper photographers. Also revealing is Schaeffer's analysis of the fraudulent policies which exclude from national best-seller lists all books published by Christian presses and of the liberal double standard which deprecates Christian parents concerned about salacious and irreligious school books as "book-burners" but which fulsomely lauds the militant feminists who systematically remove and rewrite all texts not in harmony with their dogma. Even assassins and drug-pushers receive more empathetic attention as writers and thinkers than do Christians.

Not only does Schaeffer uncover the duplicitous strategies liberal secularists use to defame Christians, but he also tears through their attractive professions of compassionate tolerance to unmask their true moral ugliness. Evincing a lobotomized social concern, *Playboy* underwrites a halfway house for teenage prostitutes while continuing to promote the unbridled libido responsible for such trashing of youth. Zealously crusading for the individual's "right to choose," abortionists often permit viable, wide-eyed, and crying "fetuses" to make *their* few hours of individual choices in the cold hospital laundry rooms where they die. Even though modern liberals are more adept than the nazis at producing alluring propaganda images, Schaeffer discovers the horror of their Auschwitz as close as the nearest abortion mill.

When Schaeffer turns from castigating the pagans to admonishing his fellow Christians, his anger is mixed with deep disappointment. How is it possible, he asks, that the tens of millions of Americans who profess to be Christians have sat idly by while skeptical vandals have wrought so much havoc? In partially essaying an answer, Schaeffer suggests that because of late 19th-century pietism Christians have largely "looked away from their responsibilities in the world and cultivated 'spiritual feelings.' " But whatever the historical causes of Christian timidity, Schaeffer demands that it end. "As we leave the shores of Christian western man behind," he warns, "only a dark and turbulent sea of despair stretches endlessly ahead . . . unless we *fight!*" In calling for Christian champions who will engage the liberal giants of modernity, Schaeffer envisions battles not on any plain in Ephes-dammim, but rather in legislative chambers, newspaper and magazine offices, and radio and television studios; the weaponry he urges is that of passion in polemics, not that of stones and slingshots. Schaeffer's exemplar of modern Christian heroism is, surprisingly, *not* an evangelical Protestant but rather the gentle Catholic from India, Mother Teresa. When awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, this diminutive woman stunned the world with "a ringing statement against abortion and the evils of an age that treats life so cheaply" which the media were "forced to report . . . word for word without the usual sniveling wisecracks and aspersions." Writes Schaeffer:

> She used her moment in the sun to strike a blow for truth, love, compassion, beauty, the dignity of each human being, the laws of Scriptures, and the love of God. Her defiant stand condemns our silences.

Fortunately, Mother Teresa is not the only one speaking out in favor of human dignity in *The Wealth of Families*, though her prayer "for this beautiful country where family life has been so strong" but where now "destruction is coming from within" is clearly the most

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poignant of the selections here collected. Among the other contributions, the reader will find a variety of rhetorical approaches and philosophical concerns—an articulate affirmation by Malcolm Muggeridge of the abiding relevance of Christian doctrine, a scholarly exploration by Allan Carlson of the historical linkage between capitalism and the nuclear family, a scathing indictment by Jacqueline Kasun of the antinatal policies governing U.S. foreign aid, a penetrating critique by Midge Decter of voluntarily childless marriage as a modish trend—but all 14 speakers and writers share a profound faith in the traditional family and a deep antipathy for the invidious forces which would weaken its beneficent bonds. Since only two in this "community of believers in the family" frame their statements in explicitly Christian terms, this is probably not the band of devout warriors Schaeffer wants to marshal. Nevertheless, at least so long as the battle rages over the preservation of the family, believers would do well to remember Jesus' own words: "He that is not against us is on our part."

Clear Glass and Distorted Images

Lawrence Meyer: ***Israel Now: Portrait of a Troubled Land;*** **Delacorte Press; New York.**

Samuel Chavkin: ***The Murder of Chile: Eyewitness Accounts of the Coup, the Terror, and the Resistance Today;*** **Everest House; New York.**

by Clay Clemens

Since about 1970, if not earlier, work has been underway on a code of conduct for international affairs. To be sure, the United Nations Charter is already in existence, but it is hardly in force; few countries treat that document and its prescriptions very seriously. Instead the international community has thrown together a patchwork of procedures and regulations having to do with the creation of a "new international order." Any nation which chooses not to embrace the ritual obligations of anti-imperialism, anticolonialism, antiapartheidism, redistributive justice, and radical egalitarianism is begging for ostracism from the world community. Nowhere is the sanctity of these slogans more strictly observed than in the United Nations General Assembly. The "world body" apparently sees as its sole purpose the establishment of the new order, or disestablishment of the old.

The Israelis have confounded a vital myth of the new order—that force is reserved for approved national liberation struggles or for powerful countries immune from the censure of world public opinion (an allowance which might be called the Brezhnev corollary). Israel has vigorously but prudently used military means to secure defensible borders, to preempt planned attacks, and—most recently—to eliminate chronic and intolerable terrorist raids from across its borders. In each case, the Jewish state was not diverted by frantic pleas to let "international diplomacy" work out "a peaceful solution": Israelis clearly and coolly perceive that such multilateral settlements invariably patch over real conflicts for the sake of a superficial peace, and they reward those aggressors and outlaws who bury their designs in the clichés of a new, more peaceful and just world order.

There are valuable, timely lessons for America in the Israeli experience if, as Norman Podhoretz recently suggested in *Commentary,* we were willing to overcome the Vietnam syndrome. Military force can succeed against national-liberation campaigns because most are but thinly disguised grabs for power. Israel has quite convincingly stripped away the mask of its own enemies, exposing them as shrill dissemblers. The military decapitation of Arafat's PLO was performed swiftly and effectively, and it may have created the conditions for a real peace.

Israel's Spartan vigor has never come at the expense of its Athenian vitality. While so many devotees of the new order find any excuse to establish emergency rule, popular-front dictatorships, and other variations of military government, the Jewish state has a natural legitimacy which obviates the need for strong-armed authority. Despite political and geographical isolation in an almost exclusively hostile environment, Israel remains more visibly democratic than all but a handful of states.

A consensus of confidence has made Israel what it is: one of the most astonishing success stories in history. Israelis are bound by a sense of national mission and common destiny that permits little doubt about the rightness of their general course. Even journalists share in this conviction: they are Israelis first, newsmen second—an order of priorities alien to their American colleagues.

For three decades, Israel has held a special place in U.S. foreign policy. With little more at stake than its moral commitment to the survival of a democratic state, the U.S., to its credit, has stood by Israel militarily and politically. Now that Americans are, for several reasons, said to be reassessing this close relationship, Lawrence Meyer's *Israel Now* provides some valuable insights. Meyer has drawn a good journalistic profile of an entire society; working from several angles, he has captured the character of Israel without overlooking *or* overdoing the blemishes.

Meyer's objective—to help make sure that Americans do not judge Israel hastily or wrongly—is understandable, given that we have never become truly familiar with our ally and friend. One recent episode is instructive. In 1981, Menachem Begin faced a strong electoral challenge from the opposition Labor

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Party, which had been gaining strength, according to the opinion polls. Many Americans and Europeans assumed that their own distaste for Begin was widely shared in Israel. Never popular in Washington, the testy Prime Minister was far too combative, particularly as compared to Anwar Sadat. Some blamed him for stalling the Camp David peace process. Even well-informed Americans believed that Begin would fall. But he won reelection and helped his party to gain additional seats in parliament.

Many U.S. observers were vexed because they had applied American standards to an Israeli situation. More importantly, they underestimated the depth of certain social divisions in the Jewish state that largely shape its political culture. For while Israelis are united about their country's role in the world, there is no consensus about the status of people within Israel itself. Sephardic Jews, those of non-European heritage, are a majority in Israel, but a minority in key areas: universities, business, and, above all, politics. This "Second Israel" feels it has been relegated to second-class status by Jews of European descent, the Ashkenazim. Begin, although Ashkenazim himself, has become the rallying figure for Sephardis against their common foe, the Labor Party and its predominantly "European" leadership.

Obviously, the other major division in Israeli society sets Jews against Arabs, particularly those Arabs living in the West Bank region. From the standpoint of national security, Israel's case for retaining Arab-inhabited areas is unchallengeable. Even when posed as a moral issue—that is, about resolving the plight of the Palestinians—Israel bears a great deal less responsibility than her neighbors: it was the unrelenting hostility of Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, coupled with their military ineptitude, which led to Israel's occupation of territory inhabited by Palestinian Arabs. But even if Israel is not morally obliged to sacrifice its security to restore Palestinian self-determination, the ethnic tension between two peoples in one state has proven almost irremediable, further sapping Israeli self-confidence. Compounding these animosities is an economic malaise caused by necessarily large defense budgets and the effects of socialism: Israel's powerful trade unions assure high job security and low productivity.

These strains come at a time in Israeli history when many common bonds have eroded: the Jewish state's very novelty, a broad-based devotion to Zionism, the aura of uninterrupted military success—each has gradually worn away. The social divisions are also mirrored in a chaotic political system that brims with negative energy. Nevertheless, there is an example for other states in the way Israelis strive to preserve their security and independence. Lawrence Meyer paints a fair portrait of Israel. About one thing he leaves little doubt: Israel has earned respect and support.

While Israel's success makes it anathema to founders of the new world order, Chile has earned this same distinction for a very different reason—for failing to turn Marxist and lead Latin America out of neoimperialist bondage. However, fashionable world opinion finds Chile rather useful. What happened during and after the 1973 military coup that overthrew Salvador Allende makes for facile equations of U.S. and Soviet behavior. Atrocities under the right-wing junta have helped divert attention from communist brutality in Cuba, Vietnam, and elsewhere throughout the Third World.

Chile's polemical value can remain high only so long as a certain version of 1973's events is widely accepted, and that requires a steady drumbeat of sophisticated propaganda. For example, anti-American film director Costa-Gavras did his bit in 1982 with *Missing*, a movie set in the turmoil of Allende's overthrow. No one acquainted with Costa-Gavras expected an accurate account, and he did not disappoint: after alerting the audience that "what follows is all well documented," he proceeded to distort every aspect of Allende's fall, slandering U.S. diplomatic personnel en route. But compared to *Missing*, *The Murder of Chile* may be a trifle embarrassing to perpetrators of the Allende myths. As the title indicates, author Samuel Chavkin, a left-wing journalist, scorns all pretense of objectivity. His is blatant propaganda and will convert no one. Only a true believer would bother to stay with this tiresomely tendentious book beyond the opening page, where Chavkin declares: "the epic story of Allende and the Popular Unity government, as well as that of the fascist orgy of sadism that followed should be told again and again."

Most mythmakers touch up Allende's record as president of Chile, the better to present him as a martyr. But in their enthusiasm, Chavkin and the people he quotes all but canonize this lifelong Marxist pol and amigo of Fidel Castro: one source gushes over the "great humanitarian side of Allende"; another declares, "He was a father to us"; and for a third, Chile's Marxist program was "a miracle and Allende made it happen." Not surprisingly, Allende's enemies are, without exception, depicted as cruel, vain, ugly, with "big pimply hostile faces."

Salvador Allende's image as a martyr for the masses of Latin America is the product of revisionism and short memories. Little more than one third of Chile's voters supported him in 1970, but in a splintered party system they constituted a plurality. In subsequent elections, even with control over the machinery of government, his party made only marginal gains, and the Chilean left never came

"A needed corrective to the shabby story put out by the junta . . . they remind us what an extraordinary politician Allende was—principled, dedicated, energetic and tough."

—*The Nation*

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close to earning a majority. When Allende tried to parlay this tepid endorsement by the voters into a sweeping Marxist revolution, there was resistance —and it did not come merely from fascist army officers, CIA agents, and assorted dupes of Yankee imperialism. In the months preceding Allende's ouster, hundreds of thousands—truckers, miners, gas workers, bus drivers —went on strike against his economic program, a mishmash of socialist dogma and wishful thinking that threatened to crush small business, wreck the middle class, and paralyze Chile with a Weimarian inflation. By his own admission, Allende was willing to overcome this resistance by choosing to "abandon the democratic road and embrace violence as an instrument." This is precisely what he did, arming his supporters (with the assistance of Fidel Castro), cracking down on Chile's independent news media, and exploiting emergency powers.

The generals acted with enormous and gratuitous brutality. The bloodbath pitted right-wing extremists against left-wing extremists. Much to the bitter regret of Allende's contemporary apologists, the Chilean masses did not rise in his defense. Like so many Marxist cliques, the "Popular Unity" government took its title far more seriously than the people for whom it pretended to speak. An honest Marxist might admit that what Chile truly shows is how incompatible the totalitarian impulse is with a society in which businessmen, peasants, soldiers, the Church, and journalists are traditionally autonomous from the state. Dictatorship of the proletariat requires politically enforced social uniformity and thus official terror. "Democratic Marxism" remains, as ever, an oxymoron. □

Counties, Connections, & Vortices

Michael Millgate: *Thomas Hardy: A Biography;* Random House; New York.

Nicholas Delbanco: *Group Portrait;* William Morrow; New York.

Jeffrey Meyers: *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis;* Routledge & Kegan Paul; London.

by Gregory Wolfe

The "standard" biography of a novelist or poet is usually 400 to 700 pages in length and written by a scholar who has devoted a good deal of his life to the subject of his book. It is often the preferable type of literary biography as it is the least likely to be tendentious: since it is not a polemic or an occasional work, it can make the case for its subject without falling into the error of hagiography. There is a high authority to support this belief: the originator of modern literary biography, Samuel Johnson. Reading a biography was for Dr. Johnson an exercise in moral reflection, and he preferred biographies of artists and scientists to those of statesmen and aristocrats because the latter were usually removed from the quotidian moral realities of everyday life.

Michael Millgate's biography of Thomas Hardy fulfills all that one could ask of such a work. Throughout the narrative the author is almost anonymous, and when he steps forward to offer an interpretation, it is based on sustained thought. It is not surprising that Millgate's other books are on William Faulkner, for Hardy and Faulkner are two of the finest regional novelists of Britain and America. Both authors' creative inspiration derives from the rural communities they were raised in; they felt impelled to transfer their native regions into semifictional places in order to distance them: Faulkner's Mississippi became Yoknapatawpha County, and Hardy's Dorset merged with the more ancient name of Wessex. In an age of urban dislocation and alienation, the regional fiction of Hardy and Faulkner stands out with a richness and power inherent in the traditional rural community. It would be a mistake, however, to designate Hardy merely a "regional" artist. Just as there is the rich countryside of Wessex which Hardy associated with himself and with characters like Gabriel Oak, Clym Yeobright, and Tess Durbeyfield, so there remains an alluring urban world of the professional middle class to which Hardy and his character Jude Fawley aspired. Throughout his life, Hardy was torn between the working-class world of his parents and the professional and literary life of London, which he visited so often. This tension in Hardy was catalytic artistically, but it also produced a kind of resentment and fatalism which undercut his art.

Hardy lived in the late 19th-century intellectual milieu which believed that massive social forces (like economic upheaval or jingoistic nationalism) and overwhelming personal motivations (like sexual passion) produced an environment beyond individual control. Tolstoy saw this in grand historical terms, hence the concept of historical fate which underlies *War and Peace.* Though the darkness of the fatalist vision would seem to indicate otherwise, it is in fact a logical outgrowth of Romanticism. The optimism of Shelley and Keats, whose artist-protagonists struggle for and attain vision, quickly darkens in Byron and later writers. The Romantics overturned the classical and Christian ideal of order in harmony and rest and glorified the individual's struggle for self-affirmation in a hostile universe. What became evident to the late Romantics was that the hostile universe was too much for them.

Unlike Matthew Arnold and other Victorian intellectuals, Hardy never experienced any traumatic "loss of faith." Though he loved the rituals of the church

Mr. Wolfe is editor of Hillsdale Review.

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and the language of the liturgy and Scripture, Hardy nonetheless felt that the only real function of Christianity was the social cohesion it provided. Millgate points out that Hardy was influenced as a young man by Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism, and that he was a lifelong friend of the leading British Positivist, Frederic Harrison. Positivism's "Religion of Man" is a wholesale transfer of Christian rites and dogmas to the worship of the abstraction "Man." Thus Hardy could see in Positivism an outlet for charitable emotions. Hardy's intense sympathy with the sufferings of animals, laudable in itself, is indicative of his misdirected sensitivity.

The side of Hardy which tended toward what he called "meliorism," the belief in definite historical progress, was overshadowed by his bleak view of human existence. As he wrote to Frederic Harrison:

> The fact is that when you get to the bottom of things you find no bedrock of righteousness to rest on—nature is *un*moral—& our puny efforts are those of people who try to keep their leaky house dry by wiping off the waterdrops from the ceiling.

The "leaky house" to which Hardy refers is nature itself. Many of the most powerful scenes in his fiction simultaneously evoke the beauty and lushness of nature as well as its hostility or indifference. In Faulkner, nature is given a quality of being which points to its *createdness;* it is a standard against which man is measured, and it implies a corresponding transcendent measure, not a mere faulty roof. However, Hardy remains a great artist, albeit one with a serious flaw. He once wrote in his notebook: "An ample theme: the intense interests, passions, and strategy that throb through the commonest lives." Whenever he works out his "ample theme," in his fiction and much-neglected poetry, Thomas Hardy is at home.

In *Group Portrait* Nicholas Delbanco has attempted an interesting type of literary biography, what he calls "A biographical study of writers in community." Delbanco has researched the interrelationships among five novelists who all lived in the rolling hills of Kent and Sussex at the turn of the century. Delbanco's contention is that Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, Ford Madox Ford, Henry James, and H.G. Wells were part

of a self-conscious community of writers who sought to learn from and collaborate with each other.

The first thing that is apparent about *Group Portrait* is that its author is a novelist himself. The book seems to be written more for other novelists than for the intelligent layman, as Delbanco makes passing references to things which no one but a specialist in literary history would know. Even his thesis seems strained: though he does show a number of brief collaborations and exchanges of letters, there is no sign that these writers gathered together with the specific intent of working together. In the same neighborhood lived Rudyard Kipling, John Galsworthy, W.H. Hudson, and others, but they go unexamined.

Delbanco devotes a section to Stephen Crane but never proves how he can be directly related to the other novelists. His portrait of the young Crane, the committed artist dying slowly of consumption, living extravagantly in order to hide his illness, is excessively romantic. Crane was a prodigy as a journalist and fiction writer whose career was sadly cut short. But his only major work is *The Red Badge of Courage,* which was written well after the Civil War by a man who had never participated in it. It was the guilt Crane felt for not fighting in the war that feeds the bleak "naturalism" of the novel. Crane can be seen as one of the first "existentialists" whose experience was that of radical alienation and isolation.

The next section, covering Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad, is the most convincing. Their period of collaboration was limited but intensive, and they were both at the right moments in their careers to profitably absorb each other's influence. The Polish seaman who had settled in England and had published some of his tales was still feeling his way toward a fluent narrative style. Ford was another prodigy who had more fluency than structure or substance. Conrad gained a greater ease of expression, and the structure which Conrad insisted on made Ford's few great novels shine amidst the mountains of dross he wrote. In addition to his fine craftsmanship, Conrad possessed a profound insight into the cultural crisis of the West, evident in such novels as *Heart of Darkness, The Secret Agent,* and *Under Western Eyes.*

Delbanco's final chapter covers Henry James and H.G. Wells. Once again, he fails to show their association in any other way than an intermittent correspondence, but the debate about the novel in which they engaged is highly significant. Wells and James exemplify opposite poles of the argument about the role and function of the novel, or of art in general. James, of course, held a view close to "art for art's sake" which required the novelist to render a full, impressionistic picture of life in his fiction. Wells, the high priest of progress, argued that the role of the novel should be didactic: it must be journalistic, reporting in the muckraking style, and it must move people to action, by which he meant socialist revolution and "free love." A glance at bookstore shelves will show who is still being read: the only Wells novels

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available are science fiction/adventure stories and *Tono-Bungay,* his one attempt at Jamesian, serious fiction. But it would be misleading to take this as the only measure of Wells's impact on modern thought. His was the kind of corrosive intellect—like that of George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell—that provided a set of assumptions to fill the minds of secular liberals. More sinister than his ideas about sex and socialism (which weren't original and were better put by others) was his prostitution of the novel to directly political ends.

The one period in which literary biography has been the least scholarly and most marred by ideological bias is the 20th century. In particular, three artists whose creative power and insight into modern culture are unsurpassed—Ezra Pound, Roy Campbell, and Wyndham Lewis—have been branded as "fascists." There has been little or no opposition to this distortion, and even those who are now cautiously emerging to defend these writers do so on grounds that concede the "fascist" elements in their work. The title of one recent book on Wyndham Lewis, written by a Marxist, is typical: it is called *Fables of Aggression.* A well-known literary critic, Denis Donoghue, remarked about Jeffrey Meyers's biography of Lewis that Meyers "doesn't dodge the fact that Lewis was one of the most obnoxious men of his time. Only Evelyn Waugh and Bertholt Brecht are in the same league when it comes to nastiness." Putting Waugh and Lewis together is an indication that Donoghue thinks conservative satire "nasty" and "obnoxious." At the antipode from Donoghue's comment is one made by Ezra Pound, who could sum up a character in a pithy, straightforward way. He said of Lewis:

> A man with his kind of intelligence is bound to be crashing and opposing and breaking. You cannot be as intelligent, in that sort of way, without being prey to the furies. . . . A volcanic and disordered mind like Wyndham Lewis's is of great value, especially in a dead, and for the most part rotted, milieu.

Wyndham Lewis felt he had to be a scourge of the rotted milieu of 20th-century intellectual and artistic culture. That is why he posed as "The Enemy," not, as some critics would have it, because he was paranoid. Edwardian England was dominated by the Bloomsbury Group, under the leadership of Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf, and its snobbishness was matched only by its decadence and homosexuality. The other "in" circle was the Sitwell triumvirate, presided over by the gaunt and imperious Edith. In the 30's came the appealing strumpet, communism. Lewis knew all of these movements to be the death rattle of a culture which could no longer support freedom and looked for a "benevolent" tyranny to relieve it of its misery. It was this wasteland that was the subject of his short-lived magazine *Blast,* of his paintings, and of his devastatingly satirical novels like *The Apes of God.*

Many conservatives have not approached Lewis because they are suspicious of his modernist technique in both his paintings and his prose style. Such conservatives accept T.S. Eliot's "patient etherised upon a table" because they identify with the Anglo-Catholic, Royalist Eliot who emerged as the poet's persona. The fear of modernism is bound up with a fear of abstraction, disjointedness, and disorder in art. These concerns are valid, but each of the great modernists—Eliot, Pound, Faulkner, Joyce, Lewis—had a tremendous sense of the past, and their technique is controlled and ordered. Eliot attributed to Lewis the invention of a new prose style which scholars are only now coming to appreciate.

Jeffrey Meyers has done a great service by showing Lewis in a human perspective. Meyers demonstrates that Lewis's commitment to art and to the struggle to maintain a free society was consuming, almost selfless, as opposed to the caricature of Lewis as egotist. He shows Lewis's broad sense of humor and the underlying love for his wife, whom he often treated badly. Unfortunately, Meyers has little or no understanding of the political or philosophical aspects of Lewis's thought and hence ignores or belittles them, and of course he doesn't know quite what to make of Lewis's "fascism." Lewis's two major philosophical works are long and rambling, but a patient study of *Time and Western Man* and *The Art of Being Ruled* reveals a mind which has penetrated to the bottom of the modern malaise. *The Art of Being Ruled* is a massive attack against socialism, a plea for a restoration of order in a society essentially anarchic. Lewis's admiration for Mussolini was a rare departure from analysis to wish fulfillment, but if we take what Lewis *thought* he saw (what he projected) we can see the continuity and integrity of his work.

Meyers is also apologetic: he admits that Lewis was primarily a negative critic without positive vision, which goes along with the frequent comparison of Lewis with Jonathan Swift. It is a good comparison, for Swift has been denied the positive vision he really did possess. Both men had volcanic minds that were deeply affected by decadence, folly, and servility, and their savage satire is rooted in an idea of order which underlies their attack. At a time when D.H. Lawrence and his comrades-in-primitivism were running after the dark gods of the flesh, Lewis stood for the primacy of reason much as Swift did. □

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COMMENDABLES

Realities Behind the Curtain

Richard F. Staar: *Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe;* Fourth Edition; Hoover Institution Press; Stanford, CA.

The image of Eastern Europe has been raised during the past two years by the struggles of Solidarity in Poland. Most Americans obtain their information about that part of the world from *Time, Newsweek,* and the daily papers. On occasion there will be something like "A Letter from Poland" by Ronald Sukenik which appeared in the *New York Times Book Review,* ostensibly a sensitive analysis by a talented novelist, actually a string of banalities. Many other popular magazine pieces are of the same ilk. Thus, the image is a fuzzy one at best. *Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe* is a welcome arrival on the scene now dominated by muddled and massaged information. Richard F. Staar is a senior fellow of the Hoover Institution. Until January 1983, Mr. Staar was ambassador to the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction negotiations in Vienna. His learning is deep and his perceptions are keen. While this text on the Eastern European countries could be beneficially employed in the classroom, the analysis of the regimes is one of value to any trying-to-be-informed observer of the world. Journalists and others reporting on the countries detailed should be required to read and digest the data before putting ink to paper or lips to microphone. □

The Art of Sayings

Warren Chappell and Rick Cusick: *The Proverbial Bestiary;* TBW Books; Woolwich, ME.

What a delightful little volume to page through, to keep on the coffee table, to present as a gift. Each page features an ancient proverb recorded in Mr. Cusick's graceful calligraphy, which perfectly complements each of Mr. Chappell's masterful drawings pictorializing the words. The power of the artwork matches the wisdom of the well-worn sayings. □

Erratum

In the "Music" section of the February 1983 *Chronicles of Culture,* entitled "Struttin' with Some Ideas," the line that read: "Along the way he offers useful insights: in the chapter on the singer Bobby Blue Bland, for instance, we find Giddins's perception of the difference between expectations of the jazz audience (progress and innovation) and the hunger of the jazz audience (satisfaction of the tradition) . . ." should have read: ". . . expectations of the jazz audience (progress and innovation) and the blues audience (satisfaction of the tradition) . . ."

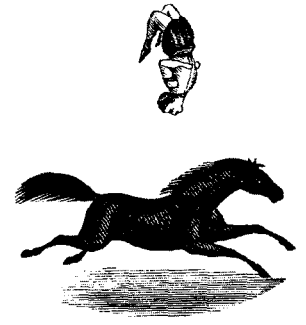
R.U.R. Today

Gordon Pask with Susan Curran: *Micro Man: Computers and the Evolution of Consciousness;* Macmillan; New York.

> . . . a small number of computer scientists are engrossed in trying to prove that someday it will be possible to create an organic computer, or 'biochip,' an incredibly small package of computer circuits assembled from molecules.
>
> *Wall Street Journal* (6 January 1983)

> . . . old Rossum wrote the following among his chemical specimens: 'Nature has found only one way of organizing living matter. There is, however, another method, more simple, flexible and rapid, which has not yet occurred to nature at all. This second method by which life can be developed was discovered by me today.'
>
> Karel Capek, *R.U.R.*

In his second State of the Union Message, President Reagan talked about "high technology" in tones reminiscent of those used by a wagon master in a B-movie whose circled wagon train is being attacked by what appears to be the entire Sioux nation. Instead of "high technology" the savior would be "the cavalry." Whether those products emerging from the Route 128 area of Boston and from that fabled valley in California (*El Dorado* now means silicon, soon, perhaps, gallium arsenide or nonmineral substances) will save the economy of this nation remains to be seen. However, while, as President Reagan noted with pride, the U.S. is second to none in terms of technological development, what he didn't mention is that it is not in the fore of those countries *applying* those developments. The country's basic industries—steel, automobile, heavy equipment, and machinery—are in bad shape not simply because of unfair foreign competition and/or restrictive government regulations. While it is true, for example, that Japan makes it next to impossible for American cars to emerge in great numbers on the streets of Tokyo and that its government works *with* industry and academia, it is



also true that there is an entrepreneurial spirit in that country which has consistently sought out and applied advanced technology: computers, robots, unmanned manufacturing systems, etc. A Toyota or a Datsun doesn't cost, on the average, $2,500 less than a GM or Ford product just because the Japanese workers earn less money but, as auto analyst James Harbour points out, also because it takes American automakers nearly twice as long to build cars. That's high technology.

President Reagan pointed out in his address that computers and similar devices are mysterious to most Americans. That is (a) true and (b) unfortunate. High technology will not only have a possible salutary effect on the American economy in the future, it will *be* the future, at

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least in terms of quotidian life. Medicine, banking, design, education—these are but a few of the areas that have already been changed by computer technology (e.g., CAT scanners, automatic transfer of deposits, computer-aided design terminals, BASIC classes), and this list barely scratches the surface: think of your wristwatch or pocket calculator. In the world that is becoming, ignorance is not blissful and, like it or not, it will be—no, *is*—folly to remain uninformed. Those who don't study the past may be doomed to repeat it; those who don't stay abreast of the present or who ignore its consequences for the future may be doomed.

Dr. Gordon Pask is a director of research for firms in the U.S. and England, a professor in the department of cybernetics at one British university, and a professor at the London School of Architecture. All positions but the last-named can be irresponsibly dismissed with the epithet "blue-sky"; Dr. Pask may be a visionary, but he also has his feet on the ground. *Micro Man* is a beautifully illustrated text that appears to be easily accessed by the computer illiterate. It isn't. Although the first chapter contains an excellent introduction to computers, the going rapidly gets rough, even though efforts are made to propel reading. Of course, this is assuming that the book's Introduction is traversed, wherein it's stated that:

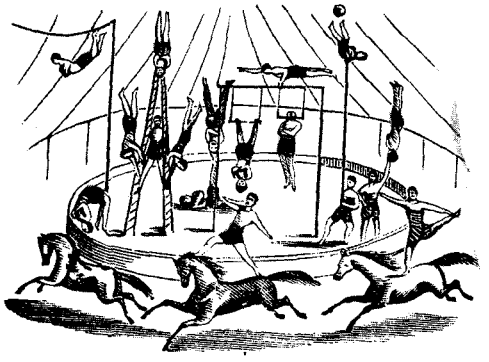
> qualitative changes in the relationship between machines and human beings . . . are leading to the evolution of a new species, a species we have dubbed 'micro man,'

and that

> Computers are no longer merely our tools. They are a species in their own right, neither independent from us, nor subservient to us.

This may sound like bunkum. It isn't, at least not entirely. As the first of the headnotes indicates, research is being performed toward the end of producing commercially viable biological computers. A key application area for the biochips is the human body. The second headnote is from a play written in 1921 in which the word *robot* appears for the first time. *R.U.R.* tells of a world wherein high technology, in the form of organic robots, results in the destruction of the human race. That vision may be extreme—but no more so than that of computers that will literally "grow" themselves.

High technology may, as President Reagan hopes, save the economy like the cavalry did the travelers. But if leaders in politics, religion, business, the social sciences, and the arts don't join their brethren in the engineering and scientific communities, high technology may relieve Americans of their scalps. □



IN FOCUS

Vetting the Puppies of Conflict

Sir John Hackett: *The Third World War: The Untold Story;* Macmillan; New York.

by Alan J. Levine

This so-called "untold story" is a follow-up and companion to Sir John Hackett's 1979 *The Third World War: August 1985.* It elaborates the picture given in the earlier book of a Soviet attack on NATO, with conventional weapons, in August 1985, as seen from 1987. Most of the virtues and vices of the first book are reproduced in this one. The reader of *The Third World War,* however, should be warned that the fictional near-future world shown in this book does not quite jibe with the one shown in the earlier volume, at least in its politics. It is a comment on the reliability of "futurology" that Hackett's original forecast, only three years old, has been outdated by a number of events, especially in the Middle East.

Like the first book, this is a curious mix of pessimistic and optimistic assumptions—tending toward the latter. While stressing the need for NATO preparedness, Hackett believes the Soviet giant has feet of clay, and that the other side fully shares our horror of nuclear war. Unlike the first, this book attempts to come to grips with the problem of the nuclear-arms race—but not successfully, for Hackett assumes that a START agreement of the sort now being sought by the Reagan Administration will defuse the nuclear problem. But an agreement of that sort is not very likely in a "prewar" period in which Soviet aggressiveness is increasing. It seems that Hackett is a bit reluctant to face the full danger of nuclear war, as opposed to a big conventional conflict. He himself notes a number of technical developments—such as particle-beam weapons and the use of electromagnetic pulses generated by nuclear blasts in space to disrupt electronic devices over an entire continent—which could totally change the strategic nuclear situation. But he assumes that both sides will happily agree to sit on the lid of what he terms the "Pandora's Box" of technological advance. That is not a very likely assumption. Perhaps

it is not even a truly optimistic one, for some of these developments just might take mankind out from under the shadow it has been living in since 1945.

One of the failings of the new text is found in its treatment of politics. Everybody, except the Soviets and, oddly, the Israelis, turns out to be nice and sensible at the critical moments. Hack-

Dr. Levine is a frequent contributor to these pages.

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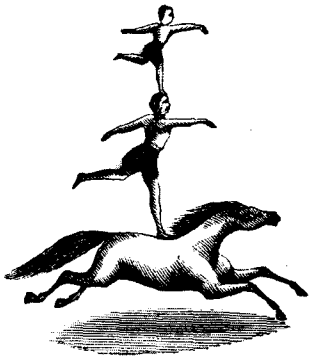
ett's good-humored, if pompous and condescending, tone fails a bit when he contemplates the "peace movement" in the West; but he seems to think that when the pressure is *really* turned on most people everywhere will see the light and resist evil. In Hackett's "prewar" period, the dangerous endemic crises in both the Middle East and Latin America are defused by wise statesmanship. Hackett's solution for the Central American crisis sounds like a new and improved version of the Indian rope trick. His view of the Middle East is merely an elaboration on the familiar line that the real issue is the Palestinian problem, a notion that has been almost totally disproven. It is rather amazing, however, to see Hackett suggest that Western Europe cannot take up the "slack" in American military support for Europe created by the diversion of effort to the Rapid Deployment Force, because it disagrees with our Middle East policies. (That is, the Europeans can't be expected to pull their own weight and defend themselves because they don't agree with the way we are defending their interests in the Middle East.) It can only be said that this is a splendid example of the sort of argument, or excuse, that has bedeviled Western policy for decades; in any other guise it would probably be rejected vehemently by a man like Hackett.

The extent to which Hackett's view of the world is unduly infected by optimism is suggested



by two aspects of his postwar world. The two Germanys graciously agree not to reunite—a prospect most Europeans dread, but something virtually certain in the event of a Soviet defeat. And the Chinese make no attempt to grab Soviet territory—not even those areas to which they have already laid claim. Everybody is so nice, in fact, that one almost wonders why there was a war in the first place. Sir John Hackett's book is very largely an example of Western European "moderate to conservative" wishful thinking. It is, no doubt, better than the wishful thinking of the far left. But it is not all that much better.

Arteriosclerosis in Ink

Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels Selected Letters: The Personal Correspondence 1844-1877; **Edited by Fritz J. Raddatz;** Little, Brown; Boston.

by T.L. Brink

Raddatz culled these letters out of the collection of Marx-Engels correspondence which covers almost 4,500 pages in the complete Marx-Engels works. Even though this book was written in German, and then translated into English by Ewald Osers, the original English in the letters has been preserved, even the terms that are a bit dated. Raddatz writes brief introductory passages to each group of letters and provides additional biographical and historical information.

The editor says that he undertook this project to make the Marx-Engels letters available to a broader readership. Only the most devoted scholars are willing to wade through the minutiae of the complete collection, and Raddatz has made an honest effort to assemble the most exciting and representative correspondence. However, there is still too much detail and irrelevancy. And since articles and books were the primary vehicles for the expression of ideas about Marxist doctrine and world developments, the letters have the banal tone and content of 20th-century telephone conversations.

About Friedrich Engels we learn that he was a pampered scion of a wealthy family. He felt ashamed of his wealth and luxury, but not so ashamed that he gave it up. He enjoyed a fox hunt and the camaraderie of genteel society. He resented the power that his family's wealth had over him, but he willingly succumbed to it. Marx's wife was apparently cool to Engels, probably due to the latter's unmarried cohabitation with women. The most interesting theme of Engels's letters is that he is clearly the more devoted member of the Marx-Engels friendship.

The correspondence reveals even more about Marx. He was not famous during his life. He struggled to get a series of articles published in the New York *Herald.* He was positively envious of the success of other radicals. He deprecated democrats and believed that Russian peasants were idiots. Marx and Engels laced their correspondence with profanity and exhibited a strong disdain for homosexuals.

The most pervasive themes are poverty and disease, real or imagined. Marx is always begging Engels for enough money to pay the back rent and the grocer's bill or to redeem something from the pawnbroker. Engels frequently urged Marx to complete a given writing assignment, and although Marx could write with great speed when he was inspired, he could be months or years late when he was not. Marx complained about his "liver" and went to great lengths to describe his suffering and how it utterly prevented him from writing, even by dictation. On the basis of these letters it is tempting to diagnose Marx as a depressive who used somatic complaints to deny a sense of failure and to flee from what few responsibilities he had. The later letters also indicate a mild senile deterioration of Marx's cognitive faculties. □

Dr. Brink is editor of Clinical Gerontologist.

Unraveling the Meaning of Meany

Archie Robinson: ***George Meany and His Times;*** Simon & Schuster; New York.

According to the wisdom of Calvin Coolidge, what this country really needs is a good 5¢ cigar. According to Archie Robinson, the national benefits deriving from a good, inexpensive stogie may be remarkable indeed—especially when it protrudes from the face of one George Meany. As he appears in the pages of Mr. Robinson's biography, America's most prominent labor leader for a quarter of a century is an admirable representative of the American ethos. Like a character out of some Horatio Alger plot, Meany (a dropout from a Bronx high school) parlayed a keen native intelligence, strength of character, rough folk eloquence, and a deep commitment to the labor cause into national prominence, becoming the voice for millions of American trade

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unionists.

Meany, conservatives will recall, often marshaled his troops under the liberal banner, not only on such matters as right-to-work laws and situs picketing, but also on the larger issue of the Federal government's role as the guarantor of health, prosperity, and equality. Nevertheless, Meany generally treated conservative ideological opponents with fairness and respect and was a staunch defender of the integrity of the American system. In his advocacy of welfare-state capitalism, he was just as adamantly critical of those on the left as he was of those on the right. He loathed the "left-wingers" who made "a shambles" of the '68 Democratic Convention, flatly rejecting the media's representation of the Chicago police as the aggressors in the melee, and he could never understand why the same liberals who denounced right-wing dictatorships could also promulgate "a policy of appeasement of Communist suppression." Always suspicious of Soviet ambitions (even, surprisingly, voting for Dewey in '44 rather than for FDR because he felt that Republicans could deal more effectively with the Russians), Meany denounced Stalin as "the Russian Hitler" as early as 1947 and remained a committed cold warrior until his death. He spoke out repeatedly against what he called "one-sided détente" and was outraged when the White House refused to open its doors to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, with whom he developed a relationship of deep mutual respect. Nor was Meany's criticism restricted to Russian communism: unlike other American liberals, he was never taken in by Castro's fair words, and he saw oppression as the only possible consequence of the spread of Marxism in Latin America. Long before the events in Poland confirmed his view, Meany believed that free trade unions and communism were utterly incompatible.

One may legitimately regret that other inadequacies of the liberal perspective remained largely undetected by Meany—and by Robinson, whose book relies so heavily on interview statements that it is almost an edited autobiography. But just the same, one can only hope that the study of Meany's life will inspire more American labor leaders to follow his example when confronted by the forces on the left. If they do not, then everything this pugnacious Irish plumber worked for will go down the drain. (BC) □

WASTE OF MONEY

An Underfed Pest

Michel Serres: ***The Parasite;*** Johns Hopkins University Press; Baltimore.

by Peter J. Cataldo

Michel Serres's subject, as his title implies, is the primordial phenomenon of parasitism. Serres's definition of the parasite* as the interrupter and interceptor in a relation would legitimately extend even to his book; its style is a constant strain on the reader, weakening one's patience and coherence of thought. His aim is to demonstrate, through the use of a diverse set of works including the book of Genesis, Plato's *Symposium,* and La Fontaine's *Fables,* that human relations and various institutions formed by them are essentially parasitic. Serres claims that there are three elements in a parasitic relation: a host, the parasite, and a third individual. All positions are interchangeable. The parasite introduces disorganization into a system of relations which forces a change to new order. Hence, there is no system without parasites according to Serres; any harmony exists only on the edge of disorder. Disruption nourishes new order and repetition brings on the death of order.

Serres explains that knowledge itself is a "space of transformation," i.e., just another type of parasitic intervention or mediation. It is a bridge connecting the chaos of the world (non-knowledge) and the prejudices of our ignorance. Thus the defining character of knowledge is its instrumentality, the continual process of testing particular choices and purposes. There is no object of knowledge which is independent of parasitic relations or immune to the tendency to disorder. It is not possible, then, to know something whose being is more than its exchange value in a parasitic relation—something which has a nature unaltered by the infinite number of relations of which it may be a part. But the existence of relations, parasitic or otherwise, presupposes the very thing that a theory like Serres's denies. In order for beings to be related according to Serres's notion they must *be* in those ways necessary for such relatedness. This entails that there is something beyond the relatedness itself grounding its very possibility; this is that which makes the being what it is, namely, its nature or essence. Contrary to Serres, repetition—if it be taken to refer to those natures which cause beings to be what they are—is not "in the vicinity of death," but rather is the sufficient condition for the vibrancy called for by Serres.

What becomes of truth? It is relative; relative to changing parasitic relations. Truth is consequential, dependent upon the outcome of activity and not vice versa. Serres's theory turns out to be another form of consequentialism, which is so prevalent in contemporary thought. Like all consequentialist theories it can be derived from the positivistic view of the sciences as the fundament of truth about all aspects of reality. It is clear that Serres's theory is thoroughly positivistic in this sense, as it uses the simple physical and biological notions of action-reaction and stimulus-response as paradigmatic in its interpretation of human relations and institutions.

Serres's consequentialism signals its self-defeating character.

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*Note: According to Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell, in their introduction to Serres's *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy,* "The parasite may be defined as an overbearing guest, an organism that lives off another organism, or a noise in a channel of communications."—Ed.

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He presumes that moral choices are possible for the host, parasite, and third individual; his theory becomes self-defeating in this regard. Like all consequentialist theories, Serres's remarks about human relations presume that moral right and wrong in the instances he examines are judged on the basis of weighing benefits achievable among alternative results of action. Such an ethics is at work in Serres's frequent condemnation of parasitic relations among politicians and the masses, employers and laborers, master/slave, man and animals, etc. His condemnation implies that free choices can be made to change such relations for the better, such as a change in the action of the parasite which would have a beneficial result for the host.

However, this evaluation of alternative goods for the other members of the relation is pointless if "to be" means to be a member of the threefold parasitic relation. Serres's condemnation presupposes that the parasite acts in a manner unlike that which he describes, which, of course, would mean the demise of his theory. The consequentialism (epistemological and ethical) necessitated by his theory is possible only if free choices are made, but such a possibility is incompatible with Serres's theory of human relations. Hence, the whole theory is in principle self-contradictory. On the other hand, if the system is deterministic, then it is senseless to impugn moral obligations on certain members of a given relation.

The metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical anomalies in Serres's theory indicate where the true parasitism lies: it is in the theory itself, as with all consequentialist theories. They are parasites on the truth of their contradictories. They appear reasonable to many only because the opposite is the truth, which must be presumed by them but is never recognized. Such is the paradoxical but clever existence of all parasites. □

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

6 "The Family and the Free Economy"

The editor of *Persuasion At Work*, Dr. Allan C. Carlson, argues that the nation's economic difficulties and social difficulties may be the same problem.

7 "America's Secret Life-Giving Weapon: Observations on the Nuclear Freeze"

Dr. John A. Howard, president of The Rockford Institute, identifies a surer road to peace than the popularized nuclear freeze.

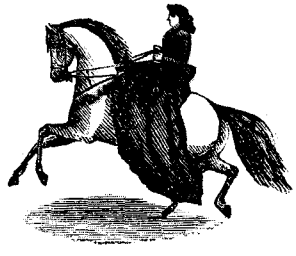
Available for 35¢ apiece from The Rockford Institute
934 N. Main St., Rockford, IL 61103

Apology for the Pious Left

Gabriel Fackre: ***The Religious Right & Christian Faith;*** William B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.

The explicit purpose of Gabriel Fackre's *The Religious Right & Christian Faith* is to evaluate the "Religious Right" from the perspective of "main-line" Protestantism and thus to demonstrate the inadequacy of its doctrines, especially its "covert" ones. The sensible reader, regardless of his creed, will soon conclude that in his picking at the motes of ambition, literalism, pharisaism, and simplism in the eyes of the religious right, Mr. Fackre is blinded by a beam in his own eye which is so big and so deeply imbedded that it has severed his optic nerve and somehow lobotomized his brain, making his book a mass of rhetorical and logical contortions. Thus he at one point concedes that "the state of personal morality in the United States *is* deplorable," making the religious right's concern with its decline "appropriate" and necessitating "much soul searching" among the silent main-line clergy; however, elsewhere he points to the religious right's "preoccupation with sins related to sexuality" as evidence of an inadequate conception of God, while congratulating his "main-line" colleagues for concentrating instead on civil rights, feminism, income redistribution, antinuclear activism, and ecology. Lest this leftist agenda be mistaken as a secular substitute for the gospel, Mr. Fackre is careful to note that Christian doctrine does not permit *definite* endorsement of any political order, "be it capitalist or socialist," though of course his pious booing at capitalism and reverent cheering for the welfare state is justified by his terrestrial interpretation of a few favorite scriptures. He represents the political efforts of the religious right as attempts "to create the political documents" it wants through "governmental changes" (motivated largely by "a lust for godlike power"), while simultaneously faulting the right for an inordinate "stress on freedom" and conveniently ignoring the fact that virtually all of the "governmental changes" cited are attempts to recover a status quo liberty enjoyed under existing documents before power-hungry utopians (including many endorsed by Mr. Fackre) bent them out of shape.

The most damning inconsistency in his stance as an apologist for main-line Protestantism is expediently covered by the passive voice when conceding that the religious right's steadfast affirmation of the Incarnation is refreshing "at a time when concerted attacks are made on this fundamental Christian doctrine." Who are the masked attackers? Chief among them are main-line Protestant ministers whose commitment to the "social gospel" of Caesar-imposed programs has so completely displaced their faith in the promises of the Christian God that thousands of believers are leaving the chapel crying, as did Mary Magdalene, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." (BC) □



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SCREEN

Greatness Unincarnate

***Gandhi;* Written by John Briley; Directed by Richard Attenborough; Columbia Pictures.**

by Stephen Macaulay

A reclining figure with a spine of case-hardened steel: that was Gandhi. Few others in the 20th century show, as he did, that a tenacious belief in truth, in the dignity of man, and in the power of ideas is worth living and dying for. Gandhi had charisma, though not in the homogenized PR-agency John F. Kennedy sense that is all surface, but in the deeper, more profound sense of the term, one that emerges from the spirit, not from a press release. Gandhi was a good man, which is not to say that he was pure, without fault, for to be man presupposes blemish. Blake's comment about Milton, that he "wrote in fetters

when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell," points up the extreme difficulty of portraying goodness. It is extraordinarily hard to make a film biography, given the complexities of *any* life—not merely that of a great figure—and the demands of the box office. So, trying to make the life of a good man into a cinematic product is an enormous task. Mr. Richard Attenborough wasn't up to it in *Gandhi.* The film is one part *National Geographic* television special, one part television news and opinion talk show. Both parts are translated to the wide screen, only through enlargement, not through enhancement. Mr. Attenborough, it seems, employed Candice Bergen and Martin Sheen for American viewers to identify with and John Gielgud and Trevor Howard for British viewers; either the characters those actors play are superfluous or the character didn't need the actor. The implication is that Anglo-Americans couldn't identify with the dark-skinned characters. Goodness knows no bounds.

The truth of goodness is best captured and conveyed in poetry. *Gandhi* aspires not to poetry, but to documentary. Gandhi the good man remains untouched.

ART

Books, Albums, Books

***Jules Feiffer's America: From Eisenhower to Reagan;* Edited by Steven Heller; Alfred A. Knopf; New York.**

***Tobey's 80: A Retrospective;* University of Washington Press; Seattle.**

***The Blue Four: Galka Scheyer Collection;* Edited by Sara Campbell; University of Washington Press; Seattle.**

***Graphics and Other Works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec;* University of Washington Press; Seattle.**

Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine: *Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz 1920–1950;* William Morrow; New York.

Over the years, Mr. Feiffer has become a sort of epitome, a phenomenon that exemplifies how liberal and leftist attitudes in life and ideology are now—in our age—symbiotic with hysteria and malaise. And that, perhaps, makes him one of the most important cartoonists alive. As a man of prodigious graphic sensitivities, and no lesser sense of style, he evolved a technique of portraying the convergence of radicalism and fashionableness, the correlation of modern, middlebrow franticality of mind with the tyranny of modish poses —a relatively new factor of Western civilization, an offshoot of its affluence and the mass production of culture. Mr. Feiffer's idiosyncratic portraiture of the miniphilosophies of the era are a valuable mirror of propensities and mores of the contemporary collective or individual consciousness, of the shallowness of his own political sensitivities. One can both study and relish his work.

* * *

The University of Washington at Seattle is lately pursuing a highly ambitious program for its books on the arts. Those publications are often an imaginative refinement of the catalogue form, making available known and valuable collections currently in the possession of museums, galleries, or private individuals. The University of Washington Press skillfully takes all possible advantage of this method, and meticulously prepared, tasteful volumes are the result. *Tobey's 80: A Retrospective* is one striking example of how such an enterprise should be handled. Beautifully printed,

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it properly emphasizes Tobey's involvement with the American Northwest, his indebtedness to "the night and the clouds and the salt air of Seattle." Tobey's creative wanderings through the visual modes of his lifetime are well reflected in the choice of reproductions.

A larger degree of stylistic fecundity and variety characterizes an actual catalogue of The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection of the Norton Simon Museum of Art at Pasadena. The Blue Four are Feininger, Jawlensky, Kandinsky, and Paul Klee. They got from the UWP meticulous typographic care; thus the color plates glitter with all the charms and exuberance of World War I post-Impressionism as well as the subsequent early Expressionist and Abstractionist goodies. The same approach to art publishing is contained in a volume entitled *Graphics and Other Works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec,* which encompasses the 1980/81 exhibition of the San Diego Museum of Art, and features exactly what its title promises—that is, all the subtleties and ironies of the artist with loving attention to the quality of print.

* * *

Morrow has come up with an album of mostly photographic renditions of what's entitled *Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz 1920–1950.* Now, for at least the last four decades, jazz aficionados have been inundated with pictorial histories of jazz, most of them using all the same pictures. But this one is simply superb, a spectacular achievement, a glory. What makes this pictorial history different from other histories is its successful attempt to capture the quintessence of the periodic style and ambience in which jazz grew into what it is today: a powerful seminal factor of American culture, potent enough to influence cultural substances beyond just the music itself. By including record labels, posters, score covers, and other paraphernalia of the music business, this volume creates the feel of an era incomparable to anything else published on the subject. □

Northwestern Images

Phylis Morrison: *Spiders' Games: A Book for Beginning Weavers;* University of Washington Press; Seattle.

***F. Jay Haynes, Photographer;* Montana Historical Society; University of Washington Press; Seattle.**

***Philip McCracken;* University of Washington Press; Seattle.**

UWP's publishing efforts in the realm of the arts span a rather broad variety of its aspects. *Spiders' Games* provides visual pleasure for anyone interested in the history and formulation of textiles. Its illustrations and commentary examine weaving from artifacts unearthed in primitive Peruvian archaeological digs to ancient and contemporary Latin American villages, from India and Indonesia to Europe, and, finally, the craft of our own American Indian weavers. Whether just browsing or seeking specific instruction, the reader will find it a worthy volume.

* * *

F. Jay Haynes, Photographer chronicles not only the career of its title subject, but also the development of the western territories, particularly Montana. As photographer for the Northern Pacific Railroad from 1876 to 1904, and official photographer for the first national park, Yellowstone, from 1883 to 1920, Haynes had ample opportunity to exercise his creative and technical expertise with a camera. In this volume is a well-varied collection of his "views" taken from the Fargo, North Dakota area, through the South Dakota badlands and Black Hills, to the Oregon and Washington territories: portraits, residences, towns, railroad construction sites. By far the most impressive, though, are his "views" of Yellowstone National Park. The falls, mountains, buttes, lakes, etc. possess a clarity and a sense of feeling even in black and white that one acclimated to perpetual four-color printing might not expect. The love of photographer for sub-

LIBERAL CULTURE

Useless Idiots

In *Village Voice,* one Tom Smucker, a TV "expert," displays his expertise in comparative metaphors. Writing on a recent reportage from Poland, he likens the freedom of expression in the realm of intrahuman communication in today's Poland to the "ability to speak which suggested something like America in the '50's."

We translated this sentence to an acquaintance of ours, a young Pole who had been a detainee in one of Jaruzelski's concentration camps, was kicked out of Poland, and came to America. He sighed with obvious embarrassment and, as if

sorry for the harshness of the word—internationally comprehensible, but clearly expressing his feelings in the face of the inexplicable—he whispered: "Imbecile . . ." □

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ject is clearly evident, and the album is well produced.

* * *

At last, in *Philip McCracken,* we find an artist of distinction who declines to mount a soapbox in behalf of political—or any other—causes. In the very brief biographical sketch that opens this volume, album really, of selections from his work, he is conveyed as a warmly human man, quite in tune with his surroundings, who happens to have a talent for transforming the materials of his native Pacific Northwest into creations of beauty. The photographs of his work are often accompanied by the articulate commentary of the sculptor himself. (RW) □

MUSIC

Smashing the Spheres

by Robert R. Reilly

A good deal of 20th-century "music" is experimental sound that has escaped from the laboratory. Some of it is viral, seemingly incurable. Some of it has served the homeopathic purpose of immunizing audiences from further contact with modern music. Much of this musical experimentation is due to the supposed "exhaustion" of available musical resources in the Western tradition—as if we have run out of music much as we might run out of fossil fuels. In response, some composers have rushed madly to construct the musical equivalents of solar panels, windmills, and atomic reactors.

The problem, of course, is quite different. As Stravinsky pointed out in *The Poetics of Music,* the composer's dilemma is not due to a paucity of materials but rather to their profusion, to the bewildering question of where to begin with the almost infinite possibilities available. The real problem is one of limits and a basis for them. The latter half of this question is the modern one. Before modernity, the limits of music were seen to be the limits of Nature. These were not perceived as "limits" per se but as natural laws. Music was governed by mathematical relationships and laws inherent in the structure of the universe: the ancient composer had as his goal some approximation of what he was sure was the music of the spheres. Through modern philosophy and science, however, Nature lost her authority, and everything was subjected to method, which was simply a mental construction applied to reality. If it worked, fine; if not, on to another mental construction or hypothesis which would serve until something was discovered which it could not explain. Dethroning Nature, though, left the arts in a predicament. All the arts are based upon an apprehension of form, another name for Nature, or essence. Their highest goal was to make the transcendent perceptible. But if form inheres in the mind and not in reality, it must be arbitrary and what we thought was Nature can be essentially changed. Thus the destruction of form and the elevation of method. John Cage quotes C.G. Jung: "we now know that what we term natural laws are merely statistical truths." Systems of sounds—not music—are the logical developments of this perspective. But in the arts one man's method is another man's madness: when objective criteria are eliminated, who can say what painting or music "works" and what does not? If there is no "music of the spheres" for us to approximate, art degenerates into an obsession with techniques.

American composers have, to varying degrees, been affected by the modern crisis in art and the tyranny of technique, according, of course, to their own views of reality. Janet Peyser has remarked that one fundamental view of reality is reflected in the works of two American composers: "Babbitt's highly structured form and Cage's negation of form—a form in itself—have a common base: both are restatements that there is no *a priori* order, no God-given frame of reference, no 'natural' synthesis with melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre playing their 'appropriate roles.' " Such denatured music necessarily degenerates into depersonalized sounds unrelated to anything. Lucio Fontana once put a knife through his canvas and entitled it *The End of God;* aural equivalents of this gesture of nihilism abound from composers embracing the *contra naturum* mentality. That is, they gain what force they have from the form against which they work. They have nothing in and of themselves, and therefore no sustaining power. John Cage composes music to express the very idea that music cannot communicate anything. As E.H. Gom-

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LIBERAL CULTURE

Postmortem Psychiatry

When Mr. John Belushi, the liberal culture's darling comedian, died of a drug overdose, most observers saw it simply as the natural though pathetic end of a particularly glamorized life. Ms. Bette Midler, a noted psychoanalyst, explained in a recent interview that matters were more complex:

> I believe John was basically playing a character. . . . He wasn't that kind of man at all, yet he forced himself to live that lifestyle because he felt it was expected of him. And then he died of it.

His character killed him.

We assume Dr. Midler had Mr. Belushi on the couch long enough to come up with such a brilliant diagnosis. □

brich said of Dadaism, its meaninglessness unavoidably takes on meaning "from its reference to the idea of art it derides." We might call this phenomenon the rejection of meaning.

One experimenter, a genuine one in the sense that he attempts to explore a means to greater musical expression, is Lou Harrison. He is an American original in the tradition of Henry Cowell, with whom he studied. He also studied with Arnold Schoenberg but avoided being dominated by his 12-tone method. Harrison has used a wide variety of techniques, including non-Western ones, but not because he has mistaken means for ends. He is a man in search of a language because he desires to communicate. He does not lose himself in a search for pure originality—although he has achieved novel effects—nor does he indulge in "conceptual" art. His personal motto is "Cherish, Conserve, Consider, Create," hardly the manifesto of a revolutionary, although he is known as an avant-gardist. He can also write melodies of disarming simplicity and beauty. Even at its wildest, Harrison's work seems to spring from an acceptance of and a reflection on an a priori God-given order. This is explicit in his *Mass to Saint Anthony* and other religious works.

The results of Harrison's most recent efforts are available on Composers Recordings (CRI SD455): *Three Pieces for Gamelan with Soloists* (1978) and *String Quartet Set* (1979), both of which evince the non-Western influences on his music. The *Quartet,* accessible and melodious, sounds Middle Eastern and is based in part on medieval materials. It is an intriguing and gentle work, if devoid of some of the drama of Western music. Its fourth movement, the only one fully harmonic in the European style, favorably resembles Robert Simpson's *First String Quartet.* The gamelan, an Indonesian folk orchestra, is used with French horn, flute, and viola in *Three Pieces.* The Oriental sounds are beguiling, but the simple melodies employed by the soloists are a little too sweet. Harrison avoids the monotony of Oriental music, but *longeurs* occasionally creep in.

Harrison also contributed to a fascinating digital Nonesuch recording (D-79011) called *The Waltz Project.* Here we have displayed in miniature the full range of modern compositional techniques turned to the waltz form by 17 composers including Sessions, Cage, Babbitt, and Glass, as well as relative unknowns. Nothing could seem further from the spirit of our age than the waltz, so it must have been with a sense of irony as well as humor that these short compositions were commissioned. Harrison emerges best with his beautiful waltz-lullaby that offers no apologies. Zygmunt Krauze gives us a gentle dreamlike memory of the waltz; Milton Babbitt's piece is full of blurps and blips; Sessions's is clangorous; Cage's work, the longest on the record, is merely nonsensical sounds that begin with subway noises and go downhill from there;

In the Mail

Vested Interests **by Ralph A. Raimi; published by Ralph A. Raimi; Rochester, NY.** Essayistic peregrinations—factual and fictional—by a mathematician with a penchant for prose. For anyone who values subtle efforts.

Agenda '83: A Mandate for Leadership Report **edited by Richard N. Holwill; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC.** The first sentence in the Introduction states that "Ronald Reagan is a prisoner of his optimism." This department-by-department examination should burst his bubble.

Center Journal; **Center for Christian Studies; South Bend, IN.** On the morality of nuclear war and other teleological matters.

Liberation Theology in Latin America **by James V. Schall, S.J.; Ignatius Press; San Francisco, CA.** According to Fr. Schall, Heaven is not Earth; liberation comes from Christ, not Marx.

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Philip Glass offers a minimalist, somewhat mechanical, but nonetheless pleasant waltz. This album is an engrossing and economical means by which to acquaint oneself with the various techniques of modern composers. The wild heterogeneity of styles devoted to the same form also tells us something about our ruptured culture.

Composers Recordings has included some of Elliot Carter's early works—*Suite from Pocahontas* (1939), *Symphony #1* (1939), and *Holiday Overture* (1944)—in its American Historic Series (CRI SD475). Anyone familiar with Carter's later, complex, nearly incomprehensible music will be delighted with the exuberant, neoclassical folk romp in *Symphony #1.* Aaron Copeland advised Carter on its composition, and his influence is apparent. Its "sound" is also as unmistakably American as that of Copeland, Harris, Porter, Schuman, Diamond, Shapiro, Kubik, Goeb, and a host of other neglected American composers. *Holiday Overture* also has exuberance, but it ends in a more Ivesian way. The 1939 *Suite* is highly energetic, a bit harsh in its big moments, but still lyrical and easily accessible and communicative. European influences are more apparent than is Copeland's. This may be the best record CRI has issued in this series since Harold Shapiro's *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* (CRI 424). It also provides an insight into Carter's experimentation as a composer; unfortunately he "matured" into an extremely complex, dissonant style.

Gail Kubik also writes in the Copelandesque, nationalist idiom, but his style is distinctive for its idiosyncratic rhythms and delightful instrumentation. He made his initial reputation with film music and does not apologize for using "short words" rather than "long words" to express his musical ideas. After all, he says, "it is the *idea* which is expressed that is important, and . . . I see no reason why it must be concluded that a simplified musical speech is *a priori* routine, banal, and uncreative." Do not mistake simple for primitive, however, for Kubik's music is highly sophisticated. The second movement of his *Symphony #2 in F* is a moving piece of American music (Louisville Records, LOU 585). Orion Recordings (ORS 80372) has provided a two-piano version of Kubik's first *Symphony* (1949), which he reworked in 1979. In fact, Kubik first presented portions of this symphony in a two-piano reduction in Rome in 1951 but "with considerable misgivings, knowing that none of the work's orchestral coloration would be evident." It sounds a bit skimpy, episodic, bareboned; there are textural lacunae. Perhaps some American orchestra will undertake a recording of this symphony in its full dress. The other work on this album—*Prayer and Toccata* for organ and two pianos (1969-1979)—shows Kubik working in the same general idiom. Unlike Carter, he seems to have felt no need to change his language radically or to experiment with the "big words" of modern music.

Irving Fine is another interesting example: an American composer who, though touched by the experimental currents of modern music, was never absorbed by them, nor did he lapse into any private revolutionary language. His carefully crafted works provide great satisfaction with their lyricism and formality. Composers Recordings has issued a recording of his music from the 1950's. The gem of the collection is *Notturno for Strings and Harp* (1951), a lovely, ingratiating work with a sense of autumn ripeness in it. The other major piece is *Fantasia for String Trio* (1957), in which Fine employed serial technique subordinated to tonality. The appeal is less immediate than in the *Notturno;* it is less lyrical, but its energy and drama do attract. The record is filled out with some pieces from Fine's *Childhood Fables for Grownups.* In short, *The Music of Irving Fine* (CRI 1460) is an excellent example of modern music with both form and substance which accepts the basic ground rules and turns them to good advantage. □

LIBERAL CULTURE

Impeccable Logic

California's feminist leader of the National Organization for Women—one Virginia Galluzzo, alias Ginny Foat—has been indicted for murder, robbery, and some other exploits in her past which qualify more for a lurid thriller than for the portrait of an idealistic social activist. Before being cleared of all those unprepossessing accusations, actually sins in the perceptions of other people, Ms. Galluzzo/Foat declared, with astonishing innocence or incredible chutzpah, both of which make us wonder whether the body of one feminist hero may actually shelter a double personality—an ideological knave and a criminal genius:

> I believe with all my heart that a political climate of violence and degradation of women is in a test stage with me as its first victim.

What's most enlightening is that the legal action against Ms. Galluzzo/Foat is considered "harassment" by feminists all around the country. From a feminist point of view, they may be right. After all, allegations of the slaying of two men should hardly qualify for indictment and prosecution. Big deal, just two males. □

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The Gravediggers of Reason

Anyone who watches the interaction of life and history is bound to notice, sooner or later, that the most potent moving force in human affairs is plain stupidity. Class struggle, spiritual élan, all the forces of societal sacrifice are certainly powerful factors, but they do not match the power of simple asininity. Thus, nations or states that were successful in asserting a certain degree of reasonableness—through either democratic or authoritarian means—all based their periods of prosperity upon the peremptory suppression of foolishness by wisdom. Only in latter-day America do stupidity and wisdom have equal rights.

The rampant "antinuclear" movement in the current global situation, however much it is explicated by sages and moralists, is—at the bottom—an act of spectacular witlessness. What it actually offers are better and better schemes for paralyzing the U.S. government—which, of course, guarantees the movement's existence. Not one among its prophets and ideologists has come up with an idea for overpowering the Soviets, the implacable adversary of us, the U.S., and anyone else on earth who opposes them. An antinuclear crusader who can figure out what the Soviets would *do* after we were rendered powerless and still arrive at the notion that war, conquest, and subjugation would be eliminated has the mental capacity of a Shakespearean Bottom.

The Soviets *must* destroy us in order to survive as an embodiment of communist doctrine. If even Greenland remained as the only democracy on a planet otherwise conquered by communism, it still would be declared a threat by the Kremlin—and correctly so, for the last flicker of freedom will always be the ultimate menace to the Soviet ideological thuggery. If the covenant with a better life is under the protection of America, a world power, the Kremlin cannot rest until America is annihilated—whether through subversion, attrition by a chain of small defeats like Vietnam, incendiary activities around our perimeters, or, finally, all-out war. The antinuclear movement—having not the slightest impact on Soviet policies, intentions, designs, and acts—therefore makes war inevitable. The more it grows, the more the Soviets will be obliged to be *not* stupid and to use such a serendipity as America incapacitated by internal moral warfare. In the end, any Soviet leader true to his calling will be tempted to announce the ultimate bingo—and that temptation will swell in direct proportion to the ascent of the "movement."

JOURNALISM

Wolfe's Complaint

A moving human-interest story based on a heartrending confession warmly illuminated a recent issue of *The Nation*—the cold-blooded organ of pro-communist dialecticians. The journal's contributor, one Alan Wolfe—a professor at Queens College in New York who once admitted that, according to his conscience, America's woes are the best prospects for a better world—registers both his disenchantment with Soviet Russia and his disgust with the FBI. Mr. Wolfe was astonished at being approached by the KGB to serve the sacred cause of communism and its spiritual center—despite the fact that he once wrote a book that, in his own words:

> was an effort to show that anti-Soviet hysteria in the United States had more to do with American domestic politics than with Soviet foreign policy.

He is equally and painfully appalled by the FBI's subsequent attempt to know of anything that happens with or may happen to Prof. Wolfe, an American citizen, one who is deeply contemptuous of the intellectual finesse of the American counterintelligence functionaries. He claims that the FBI's visit is an example of "the effort. . . . by the Reagan Administration to discredit the peace movement." As a frenetic freezenik, or antinukenik, all Mr. Wolfe cares about is that movement. He moans:

> But so many people these days are concerned about charges of disinformation and Soviet attempts to penetrate the U.S. peace movement that a comment from one object of this attention seems in order.

His complaint culminates thus:

> My visit from the F.B.I. agents, their denials to the contrary, was clearly inspired by Reagan's charge that the Soviet Union is pulling the strings of the U.S. peace movement. This, to anyone involved in these matters, is nonsense, and there has been a good deal of righteous denunciation of such blatant attempts to influence the domestic dialogue.

Nonsense or not, there's a clue in this altercation that needs clarification. Neither Mr. Wolfe nor the FBI, nor Presi-

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dent Reagan for that matter, seems to understand the nature of Soviet involvement in the freeze movement in America. In contrast to Europe, where the Warsaw Pact countries almost openly subsidize West European communist parties with big money, the Soviet ideologists, strategists, and agents avoid exercising open influence in America as ardently as the devil shies from holy water. There's nothing they dread more than proof of financial manipulation or directing "the movement"—which should be "pure" and "untainted" to preserve its operational effectiveness. There are certainly enough millionaire penthouse radicals in New York or leftist movie tycoons in L.A. to bankroll it; there are also plenty of madly liberal professors and procommunist activists in the arts and letters to accomplish missionary subversiveness and idealistic corruption, to sing at rallies and give agitprop interviews in *Vogue, Playboy,* and on the *CBS Evening News.* All the Soviets need is for the "movement" to exist, to be there, in the streets of Washington, D.C. and on the Ivy League campuses—in order to achieve the Soviets' wishes. It is not its direction that Andropov wants but the bare, unadorned, unrefined, simple and simplistic fact of its presence. □

Fleeing Reds—or Red Tape?

In trying to explain away the politically embarrassing flight of tens of thousands of Cubans from Castro's Cuba to Florida's shores, the journalists of *Mother Jones,* a Castro-loving monthly, have uncovered the *real* reason all those people left their homes and risked their lives. It had nothing to do with repression in Cuba or liberty in the United States; it was simply that these sensitive people were annoyed by "socialism's most common failing—moribund bureaucracy." So what were those people crying as they kissed the sands of America's beaches and wept? Doubtless it was, "No more triplicate forms! No more triplicate forms!" □

Fun Loving at the *V.V.*

Dour bureaucrats, serious lovers of central planning—even fair-haired ones—don't have much fun and are absolutely rabid in protecting what little they do have. One Alexander Cockburn and one James Ridgeway, for example, are key hacks in the *Village Voice's* agitprop department. In a recent column, with shrill petulance, they cried and wept: "Killjoy!" According to the duo, "the CIA and the FBI are still ferreting about, attempting to show that various journalists are witting or unwitting agents of the KGB." That activity, of course, cramps pranks—starting misleading rumors, writing erroneous stories, and the like. It can be inferred from the men's sniveling that they feel themselves to be targets. It would be good to know whether they see themselves in the "unwitting" category. Or witless? □

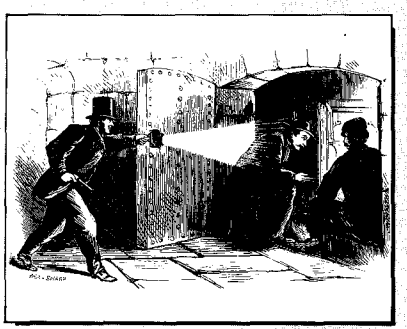
Canonization Business

Time magazine's raison d' être is not to report the news, but to make it, even out of nothing. This is painfully clear when it sharpens its crayon and examines the arts. Recently, *Time* ran a cover story on John Updike, an author, we've always thought, of workmanlike prose and banal themes. But *Time* has a different view. For it—the week in question, anyway—Updike is the American author nonpareil. It proves the pronouncement, too, through its unique exegetical approach. As to Updike's "patriotism": "He displays the Stars and Stripes on a flagpole in his backyard. . . . The house he grew up in . . . also had a flagpole." □

LIBERAL CULTURE

Theater of the Absurd

Remember those valiant homesteaders, pioneers, and cowboys who in old movies captured escaped convicts, at the cost of considerable personal peril and physical exertion, delivered them to the arms of justice, and walked away with everyone's respect and Jean Arthur as a potential bride? Well, thanks to liberal lawyering over the last few decades, as well as all those scummy pseudohumanitarian Legal Aid Societies and other champions of nonnegotiable righteousness, that's no longer how things go. Two law-abiding Montana ranchers who captured two escapees from a state prison and collected a $200 reward for their courage are now being sued for $200,000 by one of the inmates they helped to return to prison. According to one press release:



> The suit said the damages are sought because the Kelleys violated McHenry's civil rights by shooting at him in an attempt to deprive him of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Who would ever have suspected that the protracted activities of the ACLU would dwarf all efforts of Jarry, Kafka, Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter to convince us that both life and the human condition are utterly senseless. Next to the case above, *Helzapoppin* looks like an exercise in rigid mathematical logic. □

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